Author:
Jones, Robert Owain

Title:
The worlds of rural children : deconstructing adult discourses of the rural.

The Worlds of Rural Children: Deconstructing Adult Discourses of the Rural

Robert Owain Jones

A thesis submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements of the degree of Ph.D. in the Faculty of Social Science, Department of Geography

July, 1997

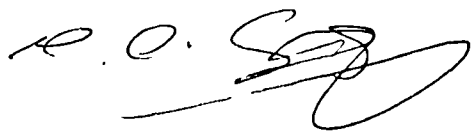
Abstract

This thesis is a response to Philo's (1992) call to study of 'how rural children's worlds are structured from without and experienced from within'. I claim that notions of the countryside being an idyll for childhood are powerfully embedded within our culture and that this is a key structuring force shaping the lives of rural children, and children more generally. I set out the nature of notions of childhood idyll in detail and then present a series of counter discourses which challenge these notions of childhood idyll, and claim to be trying to look behind the idyll image. But I argue that these counters are mostly specialised and fragmented and do little to tarnish the countryside's reputation as a childhood idyll, and that this is particularly so as there is a suite of ongoing discourses which depict the urban in terms of childhood distopia, thus reinforcing notions of the countryside as idyll. This also plays a part in the complex temporal dimension to these issues, with the contemporary rural being seen as less idyllic than the past rural, but still more idyllic than the contemporary urban. I then examine these issues in the context of a qualitative case study of a small 'idyllic' village in the south west of England which is the home of a number of families with children. Adult views of childhood in the village and the countryside are reconstructed, and the consequences of these and other forces which structure the children's lives in the village are examined. I then attempt to reconstruct some of the children's versions of these narratives. Finally I develop what I see as the key themes which emerge from the research and this amounts to a consideration of the differences and interaction between adult and children's geographies of the village.

Author's Declaration

This thesis is the original work of the candidate except where acknowledgement is given, and it has not been submitted for a higher degree in this or any other university.

The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and not of the University of Bristol.



Robert Owain Jones July, 1997.

Acknowledgements

Those who deserve thanks are legion, but in particular I would like to acknowledge: Sue, Sam, and Luke at home - the base line of everything: my parents for much help and support, and also my siblings: friends/neighbours and fellow villagers for their interest and participation in this project: Professor Paul Cloke whose invaluable intellectual and pastoral guidance and support goes way beyond the call of duty and deep into the realm of friendship: Dr. Sarah Whatmore for her guidance and warm encouragement: the Geography Department at Bristol more generally, both staff and fellow postgraduates, and particularly Lorraine for her constancy and solidarity: Dr. David Case and Dr. Vincent Costello at UWE for their support. Thanks is also due to Dr. Gary Bridges and Professor Paul Cloke for helping me with the original application; and special thanks to Dr. Jo Little at Exeter University whose kindness, understanding and help over the last year has been critical to the completion of this work.

This Ph.D was funded by the ESRC.

LIST OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTIONS

One message .... is hence the possibility of uncovering something of the world inhabited by rural children, particularly the geographies of these worlds as structured 'from without' and as experienced from 'within'. (Philo 1992, p. 198).

Where the pools are bright and deep...
Up the river and o'er the lea -
That's the way for Billy and me

Where the blackbird sings the latest,
Where the hawthorn blooms the sweetest...

Where the mowers mow the cleanest,
Where the hay lies thick and greenest, ...

Where the hazel bank is steepest...
Where the clustering nuts fall free -

There let us walk, there let us play,
Through the meadows, among the hay...
That's the way for Billy and me. (Extracts from 'The Boy's Song' by James Hogg, 1959).

There's an innocence and sweetness about country children that our eldest (city child) had almost lost. (Lauren Young, She Magazine, AUG 1995).

The myth of the rural child as being able to play in a wide variety of stimulating environments was entirely dispelled. (This finding was in common with the work of Children Today Devon) - (National Children's Play and Recreation Unit, 1992a, p. 25).

These days our children are not so much free-range as battery reared (The Times, 5 AUG 1995).

We have pinned onto children as individuals, children as persons, a whole enormous philosophical edifice, about something called childhood, which is not at all what the condition of children is. (BBC 2, Late Show. 'The End of Childhood?' Written and Produced by Sarah Dunant, 5 DEC 1994).

Oh yes I think it (the countryside) is the best place, (to bring up children). People perceive it as that, and I think it is absolutely true. I can't think why anybody would prefer really to be in the middle of a city or even on the outskirts. (Resident of 'Allswell', case study village).

1.1 THE BEGINNING IS THE END

As I sit and try and write yet another version of this opening chapter - it has proved to be one of the more problematic - I feel (nearly) overwhelmed by a cocktail of uncertainty, apprehension, relief, nostalgia, and excitement, all of which are generated by the attempt to survey the complex landscape which is this dissertation and to describe it in a way that introduces it to those who are to visit it. I say complex, not as some sort of boast, or claim to particular achievement, but out of

the recognition that all stories, academic and otherwise, are complex at least in their formation and context even if not their content.

I am uncertain about what now to write and about what I have already written. I am apprehensive because of the difficulty in describing effectively these territories which spread out into temporal, spatial, conceptual, and narrative perspectives, which stretch away into indistinct - alluring, as distant hill are - horizons, and which together form a landscape where the material, the symbolic, the past, the present, the personal, the public, and the academic, jumble into a palpable but elusive and in parts mysterious scene. I feel relief because the rest of the dissertation is just about done now, and this task which has coloured my life, and that of others, over the last four years or so, is coming to an end. The final task is to write this beginning. I feel nostalgia - and this is where it begins to get complicated - for the task itself; my own childhood; and for the childhoods of which I and other adults dream, and have written about, endlessly, and which never really were. These longings adults have for lost childhoods have profound implications for the geographies of childhood. I feel nostalgia also for places which have gone from my life, and from other people's lives, and lost places, like lost childhoods, that people dream of which perhaps never really were - the unreachable (perhaps country) idylls of elsewhere and elsewhen. I feel excitement because of the places that are to be visited, or more exactly, the potentials places have. These are both material places - a hollow hedge, a secret space in a otherwise urbane rural; and conceptual places - different ways of looking at the relationship between adult geographies, adult geographies of childhood, and children's geographies.

It has been a surprise to me that some themes, or perhaps inclinations, which have manifested themselves in various guises in my life have somehow re-appeared within this work. I came to be doing this dissertation, and academic human geography, through a circuitous and contingent route, (determined by least resistance and highest attraction), and have been extremely fortunate that these themes, the excitement element, have coincided with some recent developments within human geography generally (more of which in a moment). Other personal interests and circumstances, have also coincided with recent developments within rural human geography. Perhaps I should not have been so surprised, and, indeed exploited these crossovers between my 'private' and academic life more fully, (thus

heeding some feminist exhortations concerning academic practice, e.g. Lather, 1991), but I have in fact tried to produce a relatively straight-forward academic response to a set of clear cut research issues as set out in the opening quote by Chris Philo (1992).

This dissertation is, very broadly, about the nature of contemporary country childhood within the UK. In Part One, I consider discourses concerning country childhood, (and childhood in general, and urban childhood) which are at large in our culture(s)[1], and in Part Two, how such discourses effect children's lives in a particular setting, using the example of a small 'idyllic' village which is home to a number of families with children, including ours. In particular my concern is how constructions of the countryside as a place of childhood idyll - which is *powerfully present* within, at least, large and dominant sections of our culture(s) - feed through into everyday life as a force which structures children's lives. Such a structuring is often articulated through the practise of parents, (although constructions of idyll also impinge on many other institutions which effect children's lives), and thus it is initially parents' (and some other adults') views of childhood in the countryside in general, and childhood in the case study village, which are engaged with. Also some attempt to (re)construct the children's own views of their lives in the village is attempted. I will now try to set out more systematically the connections and contexts which form the centres of gravity for this work and which interact to give it its form.

1.2 THE PERSONAL AND CIRCUMSTANTIAL

Personal and circumstantial issues are clearly important in shaping research orientations, and the end product that comes from research - not least in rural research as set out by Cloke (1994). This emerging reflexivity has been one of the defining elements in critical attempts to reconstruct approaches to making knowledge claims within human geography, the social sciences, and beyond. To an extent this turn to reflexivity has been used to replace positivist and post-positivistic forms of legitimisation and validation within qualitative research (Denzin, 1994). Denzin sees this reflexivity as a key element in what he terms the 'critical postructuralism' phase of qualitative methodological theorisation in which

[1] I pluralise culture in this way in the recognition that our 'culture' is in fact diverse and multi-formed rather than hegemonic, and that the cultural themes I talk about will not be evenly distributed within this plurality.

'subjectivity, emotionality, feeling and other antifoundational criteria are stressed' (p. 298). In trying to establish new codes of legitimisation it seems critical to acknowledge that the researcher is at the centre of the research narrative. As Taussig (1990) puts it - 'first and foremost the procedure of contextualisation should be one that very consciously admits our presence, our scrutinising gaze, our social relations and our enormously confused understandings' (p. 216); or Barnes and Duncan (1992) - 'when "we tell it like it is", we are also "telling it like we are"' (p. 3), or Coffey (1996) - 'ethnographic processes reveal as much about the ethnographer as they do about the research' (p. 69). In other words, research accounts do, and should have, an element of autobiography in them if they are trying to tell a story which makes sense. Denzin (1994) goes so far as to say that, 'we move forward by moving inward' (p. 305). But building legitimisation around these positions is certainly not straight forward. Some auto-ethnography, according to Pile and Thrift (1995) can 'come perilously close to narcissism and solipsism' (p.16). Reflexivity can also, as Latour (1988) points out, result in a chronic 'inflation of methodology' as exemplified in the work of Woolgar (1988). Latour calls this 'meta' reflexivity which does not actually interrupt the problems it is intended to, but rather, by overlaying accounts on accounts, defers it. Latour instead advocates an 'infra' methodology which relies much more on the process of narrative - the way in which work is written, and the claims that are made for it. This, as I will detail, is basically the approach I have tried to adopt.

1.2.1 Researching the Familiar, Research and Autobiography

I am in fact researching my own class and my own location, (in terms of home), and my own culture. The detailed practical and ethical issues which this raises are addressed in chapter 5 in which I set out the methodologies employed for the case study research, but here I need to position myself in more general theoretical terms regarding this aspect of this project. Firstly, as I will set out below, some of the circumstances of my life and home village resonate with current academic considerations about the rural and particularly children in the rural. My knowledge of both encouraged me to feel it was worth bringing the two together. Secondly, as set out in chapter 5 researching at home overcomes a number of potential difficulties involved with gaining research access to quite young children. But these conceptual and practical incentives bump up against a prevailing culture of not researching one's own culture and one's own life circumstances, or as it is often put, the

familiar. In Chapter 5 I suggest, contra Katz (1994), that is not always necessary for research to engage with the 'strange', and that in fact the familiar is shot though with strangeness once it is reflexively considered. This is one of the central themes of Okely's (1996) re-appraisal of anthropology's 'privileging of certain ethnographic territories over others and the invention of cultural difference through the belief in cultural and spatial isolates' (p. ix). Okely is coming from a disciplinary context where the 'other', the 'exotic', is often equated with non-western, or even non-European societies, and thus the home territory of the academic is excluded from the 'anthropological map', for it is already apparently familiar and therefore not in need of study. This is a palpably flawed view of the home ground. As Okely shows the familiar is strange, or perhaps contains and conceals elements strangeness. She uses the presence of gypsy culture in Britain as one example which shows that the West is no homogenised and rationalised whole (ibid, p.5). But Okely also uses another example which is closer to the realms of this work. She recounts how, while giving an academic paper in Oxford, she deliberately included ethnographic research material gathered in Oxfordshire, 'the testimony...of a rural working-class man' to illustrate to her middle class (mostly male) audience how there was difference and the unfamiliar even in the communities where some of her audience may have had their homes. The response she got from one of her audience, 'a distinguished anthropologist', prompted the conclusion 'the inhabitants of one's own village may remain elusive as cannibals. They are neither known nor inevitably accessible to the average middle-class academic on home territory' (ibid, p. 4). In the examples above there is still a clear division between the familiar and the strange, be it the presence of a minority gypsy culture in a dominant culture, or differing class positions in the same village. Okely stresses the point that the familiar and unfamiliar are mixed together, they are not spatially segregated in any simple way, therefore there is the strange to be researched in one's own place, be it on a national or local level. Gender, ethnicity, age, ableness, family circumstances, financial circumstances, and many other conditions will provide grounds of difference which will create the distance or strangeness which may be a required ground for research. But I want to go further than this and say the familiar itself can also be an object of research. In the case of this work, there are a differing set of distances within the research positions taken. I do try to engage with children's worlds, and there the distance between my subject position and those of the children is substantial. In the research with adults I have remained mostly with my

own class, and within the material territory which is my home locality. My argument here is that the familiar becomes unfamiliar when one looks at it from a new position. One, for example, can crawl around one's house to see how it looks from the eye level of a toddler. One can try to explore one's house blindfold. The familiar is only familiar in a certain way. Research can destabilise that.

Throughout this dissertation there are traces of 'auto-ethnography', particularly as it is - through the selection of my home village as a research site and as I am a parent - more entangled in the obviously personal than such works might otherwise be. Beyond this, I feel I should declare more fully some of the themes and connections I have already hinted at.

1.2.2 From Rural Childhood - to Urban Adulthood - to Rural Parenthood

I grew up on a farm, was the youngest of six children, but attended boarding school from the age of 7 until I was 18. I had a country childhood - when at home - which entailed quite extensive spatial freedom, and which was shared with (older) siblings. The farm, which was the territory of my early years and school holidays, now lies under the 'problem estates' of eastern Cardiff, as it and other neighbouring farms were purchased by the local authority using a Compulsory Purchase Order. By this time I had just about left home to attend college, but I think the loss of this landscape still touches me to some extent. For the dissertation of my Arts based degree I wrote what amounts to a very crude cultural geography of the Welsh coastal levels of the Severn Estuary, and part of this was an evocation of my childhood on our farm. My then dissertation tutor commented that it had shades of the lyrical style of Laurie Lee's *Cider with Rose* - a book that features in this current work.

By the time the development of our farm was well underway, and all the flower rich (I photographed them) fields, with their Welsh names, had been replaced by 'Heritage' and 'Hazel Nut' road (seriously), my family as a farming business had a new farm near Bath, and I was plunged into inner city art school life at first in Cardiff then Bristol. At this time, student life in rented rooms, then 'thirty something' partnered life in our first inner city terraced house, meant my contact with the new farm, if not my farming family (two brothers, sister, parents, and various nephews and nieces), was strictly limited. But then we had the chance to move from Bristol

and take over, convert and renovate part of one of the old houses on the farm into our own 'country cottage'. This we did, and in a flurry of years I did most of the building work - while my partner worked and then got pregnant. We moved in, and by this time I had completed a part-time MA in Environmental Policy and Geography which in effect reoriented my career towards academic geography. I then did the MSc Society and Space at the University of Bristol , and my engaging in various geographical discourses on that course ran parallel to my emergent acquaintance with the village to which we had moved. This eventually led to my MSc dissertation on lay and popular discourses of the rural.

1.2.3 Lay and Popular Discourses of the Rural

Not only did it seem vital within rural geography to take on board the idea that people will construct their own versions of the rural, but also to recognise that these constructions will complexly divergent; often the site of contestation; and significantly, will not necessarily take on any form of completeness or coherence, which is, to an extent, the hallmark of academic constructions. Consequently the difficulty for academic narrations of social/cultural constructions of the rural is to try to take account of these deeply nuanced, fractured and shifting constructions which are expressed particularly in lay discourses, without loosing the richness and significance they hold. This theme is continued in this work. In some academic definitions of what or where is rural, the village which provides the case study for this work would not be considered as rural in any 'meaningful way' (Thrift, 1987), or would be seen as in the most non-rural areas of the UK in Cloke and Edwards' (1986) classification of rural space. But critically, in terms the lay discourses of the place, not only is it constructed as being very much rural, but is also seen as part of the rural idyll, and in the contexts of this work, as essentially a place of childhood idyll.

There has also been a concern to understand the complex interaction between lay and popular discourses. This was also part of the focus of my paper *Lay Discourses of the Rural,* (Jones, 1995), which was responding to various calls (Crouch, 1992; Halfacree, 1993; Cloke and Milbourne 1992; Whatmore, 1993), to get to grips with these issues. Crouch (1992) considered that 'there is considerable scope for the interpretation of the connection between popular culture, the image of the rural, and what people make of the rural' (p. 239), and also pointed out that 'people make their

own sense of the rural, reinterpreting dominant images through their own cultural practice' (p. 238). Whatmore (1993) points out that within British culture it was the 'unruly and intractable popular significance of the "rural" world, and the everyday reminders of the forcefulness of the idea and experience of rurality' (p. 605), which kept at bay academic questioning of the significance of the rural as a meaningful area of study. Thus in this dissertation there is an attempt to engage with these powerful popular constructions of the rural idyll and particularly country childhood idyll (as present in literature and media), and with lay discourses of the same (which are present in the everyday life of a particular place), and the complex interaction between the two.

1.2.4 Social/Cultural Turn

The interest in, and recognition of the importance of, 'other', lay, constructions of the rural is a development set within the so called 'cultural turn' which has been evident in some areas of rural geography. The various preceding phases of rural geography have been well charted, for example (Cloke 1987, 1994; Harper, 1989; Murdoch and Pratt, 1993), and are not reworked here. The on-going struggle surrounding how to define what the term rural signifies and thus what actually is the subject of 'rural' geography (Halfacree, 1993; Pratt, 1996), is considered briefly in chapter 3, but to an extent it has been side-lined by the strength of the 'cultural turn'. The body of work which addresses the rural, or some aspect of it, from the perspectives of the 'new' cultural geography of the 1980s (Cosgrove, 1983: Cosgrove and Jackson, 1987; Jackson, 1989), has grown substantially in recent years, but key early and more recent examples - (Mormont, 1990; Crouch 1992, Cloke and Milbourne, 1992; Philo, 1992; Halfacree, 1993; Whatmore, 1993; Murdoch and Pratt, 1993; Cloke et al, 1994) - share, albeit with some variation, the approach that ideas of the rural and the spaces they are articulated in must take into account the negotiated, contested constructions of meanings in which they are embodied. This inevitably results in a complex interpretation of what 'the rural' is. It can be seen as a multiplicity of overlapping and contested social spaces, (Mormont, 1990); and can function at differing scales ranging from the national to the local (Cloke and Milbourne, 1992). Some of these interpretations of the rural have incorporated (more or less radically), a turn towards postmodern and poststructuralist theories, (Philo, 1992, 1993; Murdoch and Pratt, 1993, 1994; Halfacree, 1993; Cloke, 1993; Cloke et al, 1994; Jones, 1995; Pratt, 1996). These

essentially revolve around the degree to which constructed notions of the rural can be prior to, or at least detached from, any notion of the rural as a fixed material space; the degree to which modernist based interpretations of the rural can effectively adjust to these new conceptualisation of 'the rural', and in particular come to terms with the 'otherness' of specifically sited, place, group, and individual constructions of 'the rural'. This work at various points makes contacts with these debates, particularly in terms of the rural as idyll, and issues of class.

1.3 OTHER TENDENCIES: THE AESTHETICS OF THE RURAL AND DERELICT SPACES

Beyond the connections set out above there are two other themes which emerge within this work, which, I have realised, have shown themselves in other work of varying kinds which I have done, or continue to do. These revolve around issues of the countryside, and in a quite oblique way, childhood, particularly in terms of the connections between childhood and disordered space; the latter being a significant theme within this dissertation.

1.3.1 Aesthetics of the Rural

I feel I should 'confess' to a long fascination for, and practice of, what I can only think of describing as the aesthetics of the rural. It is quite difficult to describe what I have in mind here, but essentially it is an interest in, and practice of, the visual and physical language of the rural/pastoral, particularly in terms of vernacular craft, design and architecture, and also the portrayal of the rural (and nature) in prints and paintings. For example, when I first began to make furniture prior to entering Art College, (some 20 years ago now), I made a series of screens, using the old hessian grain sacks, dried grasses taken from hay crops, and other 'rustic' raw materials, which were to hand on our farm. I also photographed the wild flowers which grew in rare profusion on our Welsh fields and the farm landscape and activities. I was always more observer than practitioner on the farm. Now this aesthetic sensibility is channelled into the creation of our house and garden. I hasten to add that this is not the practice of some sort of crude rustic chic, with horse brasses and coaching lamps. Rather it draws upon such sources as the simple clarity of Shaker interiors and furniture design, the deeply satisfying craft systems, such as green wood 'bodging' (a traditional craft system of making furniture and other artefacts from newly cut (green) often coppiced timber), and

lastly the local coherence of vernacular architecture, as depicted by Brunskill (1971). The attraction is the harmony of material, function and form. I confess a deep love of the stone tile roofs of the Cotswolds, and the red brick of the Marches. I am aware that the rural aesthetic can be identified as part of alarming ideological orientation, as articulated by the magazine 'This England' (see Sibley, 1997), so I would like to disassociate myself from all that. (I am in fact drawn to a whole number of other aesthetics, particularly modernism in terms of design architecture and painting. There is, of course, a close affinity between the clarity of modernism and much craft tradition). I do feel that my attraction and practice of the rural aesthetic surface in this work, and so I felt it was necessary to acknowledge it, but how it sits within my Celtic, atheist, pragmatist, (mostly lapsed) left/radical orientations, is left unexplored.

1.3.2 The Rural as Idyll

I (sort of) collect the Batsford guidebook covers, with their wonderful flat colour prints of a bucolic English countryside, and other prints (very financially circumscribed) of landscape and nature. The former have created an iconic style depicting the English rural as a place of idyll which is still a current visual currency. The idea of the rural as idyll is a theme which runs through this dissertation and surfaces at a number of points within different contexts, so there is a need to introduce it here. The notion of the rural as being an idyll, both in historical and contemporary terms, has received particular attention within the body of rural studies sketched out above. This is because it is such a powerful and pervasive idea within British culture(s). Its presence as such has been charted on a number of occasions, notably by Williams (1985), but also Mingay, (1989); Short, (1991); Bunce, (1994). More recently attention has focused on the implications of constructions of the rural for, often contested, and/or disadvantaged lives within rural areas, (James, 1991; Short, 1992; Cloke and Milbourne, 1992; Cloke, 1994; Jones, 1995; Lowe, Murdoch and Cox, 1995). But significantly Cloke and Milbourne (1992) point out that understanding of constructions of the rural as an idyll, and the consequences of such, remain 'speculative', and they also stress that such constructions will be as various and contested as constructions of the rural itself. In this work I will suggest that notions of the countryside as an idyll for childhood is a key, yet unexplored element of the more general notion of rural idyll, which indeed has significant implications for lived 'rural' lives. And as set out in the conclusion, if Bahktin's (1981) analysis of idyll is adopted, children are placed at the heart of

constructions of idyll, particularly in temporal terms. There are also implications for the understanding of the transformation of the rural into a middle-class idyll which are explored later.

1.3.3 Derelict/'Other' Spaces

As will become apparent, this work at certain points focuses on derelict spaces, or 'other' spaces, those which are somehow 'outside' the great tracts of spaces which amount to the regulated ordered space of adult, capitalist western modernity. Such spaces are often reputed to be, and do appear to be, sites where children can find or create their own worlds, make their own geographies. There are many qualifications and differentiations within this broad generalisation, not least between urban and rural disordered spaces, but the latter are indeed heavily present in accounts of country childhood idylls.

I have, for as *long as I can remember*, *been drawn to such spaces and this has* manifested itself in a number of ways throughout my life. While growing up on our farm in South Wales, I can remember being fascinated by, and spending many hours exploring, the overgrown derelict corners of our substantial farm complex, such as the place where the stream used to flood; a section of old green lane hidden between hedges; overgrown corners where mysterious pieces of old machinery were slowly disintegrating amongst piles of junk. I think this was a naive expression of Romanticism's passion for wildness, perhaps picked up from my always reading mother, and there were tensions between this outlook which gripped me and some of my siblings and my father's more post-war, productionist, rationalist, practice of clearing 'jungle' as he called it. Later this attraction towards 'other space' manifested itself in my BA dissertation on the Severn Estuary. In it I tried to convey the special nature of the peculiar spaces of the levels sea-shore; the tidal reaches, the sea walls, the mud flats, the wide skies, and where the levels penetrated the urban spaces of Cardiff and Newport, the dilapidated hinterlands of allotments, gypsy parks, rubbish tips and lonely urban fringe farms, which were valued by local users but disregarded in terms of development planning. This was developed in my MA dissertation into a description of how the ambivalent, wide, wild spaces of British estuaries and their tides featured heavily in British literature and in local cultural identities, and yet were mostly disregarded in planning/conservation terms.

I have also on a number of occasions - for college projects, freelance photography work, and as a recreational activity - explored, photographed, (and taken part in the campaign to preserve) derelict/other urban spaces, for example Arnos Vale, the Victorian cemetery in Bristol, and derelict sites which have become urban green spaces, but which became threatened or destroyed by development. Even in terms of literature it is the crumbling, rambling, gothic otherness of the space(s) of Mervyn Peake's Gormangasth which haunt me beyond anything else. When I now walk out into the surrounding countryside, often with our elder child Sam, it is to go to, or to search for new, 'secret' overgrown, unofficial, disused corners. Such places have the air of being spaces of possibilities, and feel like spaces of special, local, privileged knowledge. This predilection for such spaces I think does show up in my research, but, possibly, it does afford me some connection with the otherness of space which does appear vital to children.

1.4 ENTER CHILDREN

I have stated the subject under consideration is the nature of contemporary country childhood, but of course that is a vast and complex issue which, at once, incorporates all the complexity of childhood and its contemporary condition. This dissertation concentrates on the issue of the countryside being seen as an idyllic setting for childhood. This I suggest does have broad implications for children living in the countryside, and in fact all children, and also our understandings of what the countryside and childhood are. Complexly and elusively embedded in these core themes are a number of related issues which appear vital to addressing Philo's call, namely - to what extent are adult constructions of the countryside as a childhood idyll a reflection of some lived reality for children, or is it much more a creation of adult idealised imagination/memory or longing, which has little to do with the actual lives of children. Compounding this are comparisons of past and present country childhoods. Both the condition of, and interpenetrating relations between, the countryside and childhood have changed dramatically during the course of the last century, and processes of collective and individual memory, and the trajectories of traditions, carry images of the past into understandings of the present. So any attempt to grapple with these constructions of idyll, has to deal with a chronic jumble of past and present, real and imaginary landscapes and the lives within then. To what extent the changes to childhood and the countryside have created a shift in the relation between lived childhoods and images of idyll (which may remain more constant) is another issue. Within the consideration of these issues a number of

conceptualisations concerning children and space (both rural and urban) are developed, and these form the main focus of the concluding chapter. The other questions I have raised are, I hope, partially addressed, or at least better framed within the body of the dissertation.

Here I would like to point out that although the term children is being used in an undifferentiated sense, there are clear implications in terms of differences in age, gender, ethnicity, abilities, and some account is taken of this. But 'children' are often classified and acted upon en masse, and this process is driven by overarching assumptions about children - and a particularly powerful example of this is ideas children in the countryside - and it is these assumptions I am trying to address. These general constructions of childhood apply to 'every child' but will have different forms and ramifications in the contexts of the differences listed above, and many other differences revolving around the specific characteristics of each child's differing circumstances.

1.4.1 Children's Geography

Although James's (1990) call for human geography to engage with children's geography was not (and did not claim to be) the first example of geography becoming involved with children's worlds, it is a neat starting point for the consideration of such, for she tries to set out a new agenda in which children are bought into the core of what geography focuses on. This was in response to the recognition that -

> there has been little research undertaken which critically examines the ways in which children's lives, experiences, attitudes and opportunities are socially and spatially structured. For far too long children have been hidden from geography, as well as from other disciplines (p. 378).

Sibley (1991) responded to and supported James' (1990) call, adding that work relating to the geography of children was evident in the work of other 'non-geographic' based writers, notably Ward (1977, 1990) and Moore (1986). He also stressed that children's tendencies to be subversives and anarchists in the face of adult scaled order - 'to make their own places' - was a key theme which may be lost to the Marxist orientation espoused by James. Finally Sibley points out that the differences within constructions and experiences of 'childhood' - associated with 'age, gender, culture, place and time' must be at the forefront of dealing with children's experiences, and that great care must be taken both in methodological and ethical terms when dealing with the otherness of childhood from adult positions.

Winchester (1991) also supported James's call but demonstrated that a fine meshed trawl of extant geographical literature in fact threw up more examples of work on children that James and Sibley had acknowledged, and that this work did address various aspects of children's geography.

To some extent the basic position and qualifications set out above are reworked, only on a much more comprehensive and detailed scale, in Aitken's (1994) research monograph, *Putting Children in Their Place.* Like James, Aitken makes an unequivocal call for both children's geography and the geography of children to be more coherently present within contemporary geography. He goes on to show how there is in fact a considerable legacy of work with/on children, as Winchester had suggested, but this remains rather fragmented and more significantly, rather hidden from the view of the main stream of academe. Aitken suggests this invisibility of work relating to children - beyond the small special interest 'segment' which practice it - may reflect the invisibility of children themselves in many academic, political, and policy gazes. To this concern that work relating to children is sporadic and marginal, is added the worry that some of it has remained theoretically moribund in the context of developing critical social theory. For example Sibley (1996), and Aitken (1994) to a lesser extent, see this as a problem for work such as Matthews (1992). These issues are taken up in more detail in Chapter 8 when the methodological heritage of researching with children is considered in more detail. For now it should be said that these calls for the geographical engagement with childhood are now being taken up with work such as Valentine (1997a/b/c, 1996); Sibley (1995) and Philo (1992). This work I hope is in sympathy with, and develops aspects of these recent geographical writings on childhood. As they are referred to subsequently on numerous occasions I will not review them here, but instead return to Aitken who summed up perhaps what is at the core of such work.

> The geographies which encompass the day-to-day experiences of children are necessarily different from those of adults. The spaces that children occupy are circumscribed and controlled by adults, but the needs of children and their consequent uses of space are often quite far removed from those of adults. Of all people with a high of dependency, children are the most unique in terms of their universal needs. These needs are grounded in a real geography which is, at its best, encompassed by a loving, caring environment and, at worst, by neglect and abuse (p. 2).

Before I go on to consider Philo's (1992) paper which in effect draws together the rural, childhood and various developing trends clustered around new social/cultural geography I want to briefly review some developments which address issues of childhood largely outside geography.

1.4.2 Children's Views and Children's Rights

The calls for geography to become more systematically engaged with childhood, runs parallel with, and is cross fertilised by, a whole range of other emergent discourses concerning children and childhood. These range from other academic territories - such as psychology (Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 1992), sociology (James and Prout, 1990; Jenks, 1996), and political philosophy (Harris, 1982), - through to state policy and legislative patterns, NGO initiatives and even globally scaled declarations of children's rights. Although this list represents a vast and diverse set of substantive issues and conceptual orientations, some common elements can be discerned in much of it. Firstly the proliferation of interest and concern in childhood can be seen as a collective response to the position that children have often been, and often still remain, invisible within the overall planning and running of societies. In particular this emergent concern has been in response to and perhaps contributor to, notions that childhood is facing some form of collective crisis due to the increasing pressures put upon it. This movement has also been linked to emergent notions of children's rights and a realisation that children themselves need to have a voice in matters which affect them. A number of specific examples of these discourses emerge within the course of this work, so here I will briefly detail some examples.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The 'Children's Rights Movement' enjoys a 'rich and substantial heritage', but needs to been seen as a 'extremely heterogeneous movement which represents a very loose and shifting coalition of constituent organisations and individuals' (Franklin and Franklin (1996, pp. 94, 95). The front on which this movement moves has been formed by the complex interaction of two distinct poles. The first is children's rights, which are concerned with protecting children from essentially; poverty, exploitation, neglect, abuse, violence, and various cocktails of these elements. These on a scale ranging through the domestic, the work place, the regional and global (particularly in terms of warfare and environment). The second pole is that of freedom - for children to have more freedom, be it in terms of legal status, political status, or a shift in emphasis in the soft tissue of child adult relationships. Franklin and Franklin (1996) chart how the history of the movement reflects an ebbing and flowing of multifaceted positions between these two poles. This is caused because these two

poles are not mutually inclusive in any straight forward sense, and this is why children's rights, particularly in terms of freedom, is an extremely controversial issue. For example Harris (1982) exposes how the underlying reason for the exclusions of children from the rights which adults allocate amongst themselves, that of incompetence, does not stand up to any sustained scrutiny. He argues that the achievement of competences - which effectively marks the boundary between childhood and adulthood, and a status of non-rights and rights - if taken literally, would not separate out child and adult, but would rather separate out the competent and non competent, and following the embedded assumptions which we now apply to children, the non-competent would not be afforded rights and the competent would, in groupings which would significantly blur the adult childhood break.

Catherine Bennett (Guardian, MAR 16 1994) expressed concern that the 'freedom wing' (my phrase) of the Children Rights Movement are, at best, missing the main points concerning the position of children in society, and at worse exacerbating the problems children face, by trying to put them in formalised positions which they may not be able to handle or even wish for. The nub of her argument, which seems reasonable if it is accurate assessment of the position taken, is that to extend adult (human) rights to children in a way that does not acknowledge, and account for, the differences between adults and children is not going to address the problems children face. Nevertheless, 'children's rights have become a buzz phrase, a fashionable field', (Janet Watts, Guardian, MAR 13, 1996) and there is also some degree of 'backlash' against these ideas, and all this debate continues against the back drop of the on-going 'dreadful record' held by Britain on children's rights (ibid). This record continues in spite of, and in fact judged by, the 1989 Children's Act and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the British Government ratified in 1991. This latter convention listed 54 basic rights which all children should have, but in 1996 the Children's Society rationalised these into a set of six basic priorities which it would work within and towards -'that all children and young people are entitled to a good start in life, to be protected, to have somewhere to live, to have enough money to live on, to be treated fairly and to be listened to' (quoted by Watts, ibid).

CHILDREN'S VOICES

The last right, that of children to be heard, was also (supposedly) enshrined in the 1989 Children's Act (White, 1997). This shift towards a more child centred view of children's issues is evident not only in recent legislation, but also in the work various NGOs concerned with some or other aspects of childhood. For example; McNeish and Roberts, 1995; Alderson, 1995 (both for Barnardos), Barnardos (1995); Davis and Ridge (1997), and Johnson, Hill and Ivan-Smith (1995) (for ACTIONAID), all stress that the research carried out, and/or the research stance advocated, is one which takes a position of *Listening to Children.* This is, in fact the title of Alderson (1995), which was commissioned by Barnardos and which reports, 'much research is carried out on and about children, but seldom with children. Children themselves are often strangely silent. Listening to children helps the researcher to think about their work from the perspective of the child' (Singleton, 1995, p. 1. , Foreword to Alderson, 1995). Finally, this move towards hearing children, is reflected in other academic approaches to childhood, Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (1992) report that up until recently, accounts or narratives generated by children, be they research material, or evidence in terms of legal scenarios, have been generally dismissed within our culture, but now children's own accounts have to become part of how we construct knowledges of children. Pilcher and Wagg (1996) see that it is this concern to give children a voice, along with seeing childhood as a (varying) socially constructed state which represent a new paradigm for the sociology of childhood as exemplified by Prout and James (1990).

CHILDREN FIRST

Some of these approaches to children's rights want not only to listen to children's voices in processes of decision making concerning their lives, but to put those voices first, or the children first, in what amounts to a radical inversion of some of the fundamental priorities embedded in our society. Currently it is the form of adult society which is essentially the main priority of society. Children are socialised, educated and trained, in ways which make them fit for the reproduction of society (See Harris, 1982). Their needs and desires (and rights) are not priorities, but are subordinate to the (their) adult future. This mismatch between the needs of children and the needs of adult society (which is exacerbated by the pressure put on adults as workers, at the expense of adults as parents) causes, at a very generalised level, a constant stream of damaged or distorted individuals, who make up the body of

problem riddled adult society. - 'The way we have organised our society eats away at the very heart of its future' (Margrette Driscoll, Sunday Times 24 APR 1994). In an attempt to break this cycle, writers such as Landsdown (Sunday Times 19 NOV 1995) and Leach (1994) want to re-orientate the priorities of society to put 'children first'. In other words to concentrate on caring for children as the main priority of society, which would produce a virtuous cycle of generations rather than a vicious cycle.

1 5. RURAL CHILDREN'S GEOGRAPHY

Perhaps inevitably the concerns revolving around the emergence of children's geographies and increasing attention to otherness in rural geography, resulted in a call for the consideration of rural children's geography. This in fact came in the form of Philo's (1992) influential 'Neglected Rural Geographies' which set out the contexts I have outlined above and called for the consideration of various other forms of social groupings who were clearly part of the rural world. Such had been invisible to the modernist gaze of 'white, middle-class, middle-aged, able-bodied, sound-minded, heterosexual men living in the major urban centres of the west' (p. 199), who traded solely in 'metanarratives' that would usually 'steamroller over the more specific 'stories' that 'other' peoples in 'other' places tell themselves when seeking to make sense of their specific and situated existences' (ibid). Philo used rural children as an example of such an 'other' grouping, prompted by Ward's (1990) book the *Child in the Country* and Gilg's (1991) somewhat dismissive review of it in Area. Philo argued that here was a sensitive, lucid engagement with the worlds of rural children, and in some instances the geographies of these worlds, which was very 'close in "spirit and purpose" to the emerging concern of many social-cultural geographers with all manner of 'other' human groupings' (p. 198). Philo's point was that here is a group of people who are *manifestly* living in a world not of their own making and who have been mostly invisible to the modern academic gaze. Rural children clearly live within the constraints of adult geographies, yet they also contest, subvert, bypass, and/or even endorse these in the forms of their own geographies. Thus particular attention should be paid to the tensions which are generated by these intersections of differing geographies. This dissertation takes up Philo's call, and the essential conceptual framework which it sets up.

'STRUCTURED FROM WITHOUT AND EXPERIENCED FROM WITHIN'

Philo (1992) call to study the geography of children's worlds as "structured from without" and as "experienced from within" (p. 198), basically provides the conceptual framework for this dissertation. A first basic assumption behind my research is that the worlds of rural children are heavily structured from without, by adults, or least on adult terms and scales. This adult structuring comes in all manner of forms, economic, ideological, cultural, physical, and also in a mixture of deliberate and incidental forms, but I suggest that underpinning many of these are adult assumptions about the countryside being an idyll for childhood, so it is essentially this important but hitherto little studied aspect of the structuring of rural children's worlds which I initially concentrate on.

1.5.1 CLASS AND LOCATION

The geographies of rural childhood, or any childhood, are the spatial differentiations within the experiences of childhood. In any given space, or any given individual life experience, there will be differing structuring circumstances and differing subjective interaction with those circumstances. As is explored in section 1.7 there is a complex relationship between sameness and difference, but here it needs to be made clear that it is recognised that there are key forces at work in the constructions of children's lives. The activity space (Massey, 1995) of a child's life, the geographical location of that space, is critical in determining the qualities of the everyday experience of that child. Not only will general spatial characteristics, such as rural or urban, be key, but also other more specific characteristics will differentiate those general categories. Thus the urban and the rural can be seen as highly differentiated spaces themselves for childhood. In this work though, there is initially a consideration of the implications of having 'the rural' and to some extent 'the urban' as the general location of childhood. The argument is that there are a whole range of powerful adult assumptions about childhood in 'the rural' or the countryside which do structure children's lives. In the second part of this work, the attention then focuses on one specific 'rural' place and the constructions and experiences of childhood therein. This place is my home village, and is now a predominately middle class community. As is touched upon a number of times subsequently, this characteristic of being middle class is a major factor in the articulation of childhood in the village. Class is in fact one of the key characteristics which will differentiate between childhoods in differing locations. It will cross cut with

rural and urban and be one of the major forces which differentiates those categories. Clearly, there are differences between the experiences of working class and middle class children who live in both rural and urban locations. But this work was not conceived to be a comparative study in specific terms, although this was considered as an approach at the very outset. This works considers differing discourses surrounding the rural and urban as a childhood environment and then focuses on one case study location. The rural, and rural idyll, and country childhood idyll, are being seen as increasingly embroiled with middle, or service, class lifestyles (see for example, Cloke 1995, Hoggart, 1997), and it is hoped that this work can provided an in-depth look into a key yet hitherto little acknowledged element of this, that is the position of children within idyll discourses.

1.5.2 Notions of Country Childhood Idyll

So a key assumption/proposition within this work is that notions of the countryside being an idyllic setting for childhood are a fundamental force within the whole range of forces which structure all children's lives[2], and particularly those of rural children. It is acknowledged that this assumption of idyll is not the only force structuring rural children's worlds, but it merits the focus of this research because firstly, it is does have unique implications for children living in rural areas, and secondly it will complexly cross cut with other structuring forces affecting rural children's lives, some of which have received critical attention. Examples of this will emerge throughout subsequent chapters, but I will give an indicative example here.

In response to the recent political debate about working mothers, Adrienne Burgess (Guardian 4 FEB 1997) wrote an article about the shifting patterns of male parenting and work patterns - clearly a structuring force on the day to day unfolding of children's lives. Burgess compared two domestic circumstances of child-father relations. One father was rural based, and worked very long hours, the other urban based, who also was in full-time employment, but has managed to spend much more time with his children than the first. Burgess asks

> Which of these is the "better" father? Is it Derek, whose daughter hardly knows him, but *who will run free across the fields*, live in the heart of a supportive community and attend a well-funded school? Or is it the ever-loving, ever-watchful Michael, who remembers as a child 'having nothing whatsoever', and for whom fathering is an act of reparation? (emphasis added).

[2] I say all children because, as set out in Chapter 2, Ward (1990) feels that urban childhoods are often judged, within the context of deeply embedded constructions of the countryside being the ideal childhood environment.

Here, while there is critical consideration of one key issue surrounding children, the notion of the rural as being a place of freedom and supportive community, and the urban as being a place where bringing up children is a process of 'reparation', intrude. As material in Chapter 3 will show the assumption that rural children do have the freedom to 'run across the fields' is questioned, for example by the National Children's Play and Recreation Unit (1992).

There is a myriad of obvious and palpable forces which structure children's lives. These can range from processes of physical structuring - the making and remaking of rural places, spaces, surfaces and forms, amongst which children live their lives - through to social and cultural structuring, which is the ways in which these physical spaces are interpreted and reinterpreted by adults with consequent effects on how children interact with them. I suggest that much structuring is incidental in that the spaces and places that form the rural develop from the outworking of capital, political and cultural processes on adult terms and scales, (e.g. restructuring of agriculture, counter-urbanisation, transport policy, housing market and policy). These forces that shape the worlds of rural children are not primarily aimed at, nor do they take account of, children. But despite this there are assumptions in adult discourses that the rural although not structured for children, is an idyllic place for them to be and thrive.

The deliberate structuring of the worlds of rural children by adults comes both with the planning of certain areas of their lives, such as schooling and planned recreation and socialising, and also with the parents and other adults desire to exploit and enhance what they see as the benefits of rural childhood bestowed by the incidental structuring, thus physically placing children in certain types of spaces, and encouraging them to respond and act accordingly. In other words, adult expectations of a child's experience of the rural.

I think that all structuring, both deliberate or otherwise, will be loosely influenced by dominant adult cultural discourses about the child in the country. This assumes that there are various popular and public discourses about the idea of the child in the country. These may circulate on differing scales; local, regional, national and even international, and may be stratified in other ways through class, ethnicity, age, gender etc. and will also be reinterpreted at the individual level, but they will not be

totally separated, thus the search for common, *or dominant*, themes, will reveal the underlying forces that eventually work through to the lives of children. Notions of childhood and of the countryside are powerfully and pervasively present within our culture. Where they come together in ideas of 'country childhood' they can become a vision of considerable potency which may carry a heavy burden of adult longings. Such longings may be key source of the structuring of children's lives. The reputation of innocence and naturalness which are sometimes attached to children and the countryside are enhanced and distilled when they come together in notions of country childhood idylls. Unpacking these constructions may provide insights into how childhood and the countryside are seen and how lives are effected by such constructions. So the research is intended to reveal the gists of these adult discourses and to compare these, as far as it is possible, with the experiences of children that live in the countryside.

1.6 EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This section now attempts to develop the conceptual and epistemological overview of how, or in what spirit, this work is conducted. (Details of research methodologies are given later). I feel such a gesture is due in the light of the substantial destabilisation of conventional (modernist, empirical/positivist) constructions of knowledge, which now cast a shadow across most intellectual endeavour. This 'challenge' , as Cloke (1993) puts it, is as pertinent for 'rural geography' as any other field of enquiry; and as Chouinard (1994) points out, problematises the very premises of radical/critical approaches within geography. Much of this challenge stems form the development of postmodernist and poststructuralist ideas. The former - here taken as a mode of intellectual conceptualisation - which now perhaps is primarily marked as a distrust of 'meta-narrative' after the work of Lyotard (1979), and a deprivileging of 'expert' voices in favour of difference and otherness, obviously raises difficult problems for intellectual endeavour, but when these are coupled with poststructuralist ideas which have brought critical pressure on the very vehicles and mediums of intellectual thought - language, knowledge, truth, the self - it is not surprising that some see the whole notion of radical intellectualism as being at bay. I will first very briefly position myself in two key respects of the above, before going on to set out how I have tried to treat the conceptualisation and practice of this work.

Regarding ideas of the self, difference between individuals clearly remains, (and between places and times and so on). These may not be inherent, or autonomous in a simple way, but rather the outcome of the unevenness of processes of the production, subjection and bounding of the self. The differences we inherit, those physical (genetic), and also the macro, meso and micro differences of our social, cultural circumstances, construct a compounding of difference, to the point where such difference needs to be accounted for in terms of social theory in a similar way that the classically humanistic conceptualisation of difference needed to be. As Letche (1994) puts it in his review of Derrida's ideas, 'because identities are constructed and not essential, they are... *none the less important for that* ' (p. 108, emphasis added).

Such production of differences though, are countered by processes which can be seen as the production of sameness. At individual or group level this interface of production is a critical area of concern in a number of ways. Firstly, difference is deeply uneven, and although we are all in some ways 'other' to each other, there are powerful bindings of sameness in terms of collective identities and locations. We share collective identities, (such as nation), within which we have our own location. Secondly, difference is constantly being checked and opposed by processes of sameness, which may include the construction of the above identity location, and these also have attracted sustained attention within social theory. These processes, which can be seen as operating in relating cultural/economic/ideological fields, are those forces which through such processes as, constructions of dominant cultural forms, and commodification and globalization, have the effect of enforcing subject positions and constructions, and marginalising, or worse, realms of difference which cannot or will not conform. I have already referred to the assumption that different children will experience the rural differently, but that also there are 'overarching constructions' of childhood, the countryside, and children in the countryside, which in effect bring a sameness which structures those experiences. This can be seen as a very specific example of the interaction between sameness and difference outlined above. For much of this work I am concentrating on processes of sameness. At various points I try to show, firstly, how that sameness has a larger form in terms of culturally embedded discourses, secondly how it will have specific characteristics as it operates in a particular

location, i.e. the case study village, and thirdly how children's lives might operate within and against these structuring forces.

1.6.1 Explanation and Narrative: Description and Inscription

I do not doubt there is a temporal/material world of objects and events, but 'the cushion' of language, (as Rorty 1991a, terms it), which covers that materialism and through which we deal with it is deeply composite. In this circumstance the need is not to seek for ways to penetrate that 'cushion' (the always redundant aim of classical philosophy, Rorty, 1991b) but rather to deal with, and organise the texts that are the world to us, in ways which make sense, and make good of them. 'The truth' (if we must have it), is there to be made, not discovered (Rorty, 1991b). Thus we are free to become dealers in stories and texts, rather than grapplers with either transcendental or empiricist/positivist fundamentalisms. But these stories should not been seen in terms of speech, - then/and text alone. They are inscribed through a whole range of materiality and corporeality, a m(e)(a)ss of bodies and things. There is some evidence that this need to account for the embodiment of stories in the social sciences and qualitative approaches is being recognised. See, for example, McLaren's (1992) account of attempts to present embodied knowledge in some ethnographic practice, and Game's (1991) call to begin to speak of meaning as embodied, which is 'to move towards a methodology that might be understood as *material semiotics*' (p. 19 emphasis in original). This work, I feel, can only make very brief and intermittent gestures towards such problems/possibilities, but the use of photographs and other illustrations shows how the discourses I am concerned with are about, and are articulated as, (children's) bodies in (rural and urban) materially specific places.

The distrust of meta-narratives indicated above is in effect a distrust of strong (theoretical) explanations/analysis. These strong explanations seek to sum up large tracts of the world in succinct abstracted statements - ('explain much by little' Sayer, 1989, p. 263) -and are usually considered to represent some form or 'truth'. As Gregory (1994) put it 'it is a characteristic of modern intellectuals ... to see themselves as dealers in generalities rather than brokers in particulars' (p. 13). Latour (1988) feels that 'providing an explanation is "in a nutshell" empire-building; the more powerful an explanation, the larger the empire and the stronger the material in which it is built' (p. 163). This he considers leads to a moral quandary,

which is 'should we explain something?' The problem with explaining being, as Spivak (1988) puts it, 'the desire to explain (through research, is)...a symptom of the desire to have a self (the researcher) that can control knowledge and a world that can be known' (p. 104). Latour's answer to his own quandary is a 'qualified *no*'. What he prefers is, basically, description, which can also be seen as weak explanation[3].

Descriptions inevitably become narratives, both through the sequence in which they are formed (Sayer, 1989), and through the temporal aspects of events which they describe. If we are to set out, and perhaps attempt to re-order, (bits of) our world of complex texts - as Barnes and Duncan (1992) put it, 'our texts draw on other texts, that themselves are based on yet different texts, and so on' (p. 2) - description/narration seems to offer the best hope, for in effect description is inscription, when we are in fact 'Writing Worlds'. Denzin (1994) writes

> Language and speech do not mirror experience, they create experience, and in the process of creation, constantly transform and defer that which is being described. There can never be a final, accurate representation of what was meant or said, only different textual representations of different experiences. As Lather (1993) observes, *these arguments do not put an and to representation, they signal instead the end of pure presence.* ***Description becomes inscription.*** (p. 296, emphasis added).

Such an approach has been advocated by the Stainton- Rogers'(1992) in regard to the study of childhood.

> We live in a world which is produced though stories - stories that we are told, stories that we recount and stories that we create. Children are drawn into the web of understandings (and their material consequences) from the moment...the enter the social world (p. 7).

Thus the Stainton- Rogers' endorse (ibid, p. 13) Rorty's (1989, p. xvi) call for 'a general turn against theory and towards narrative'.

1.6.2 Writing (valid) stories

The culmination of this somewhat torturous positioning is a kind of configurative inscriptive narrative, in which a number of stories are told, which it is hoped, build some form of familiarity and insight into the subject at hand. But there is not some pure and sharply definable subject at the heart or bottom of the stories which they are trying to illuminate. I will try to put it this way - notions of country childhood idylls, which are a key focus of this work, are in effect an eddy where various flows of

---

[3] This is why Latour criticises established social science concerns over case studies - that they are descriptions which are not easily expandable into strong general explanation. For Latour a case study is commendable when it is not used to 'empire build'.

narratives, such as those of childhood, the countryside, the urban, nature, agriculture, and innocence, become tightly and forcefully bound together in an on-going but wandering force, which will exert on lives both near (strongly) and far (more weakly). The circumstances - (material/symbolic space, economic/social/ cultural space, gender, age, domestic structures/dispositions) - where this touches ground, provide compounding flows, developments and distortions within the eddy. The accounts that are the following chapters attempt to sample and trace these flows and depict their coming together and their effects.

So how to write such stories? Latour's (1988) call is for a method which - 'just writes. "Just" ? well not exactly' (p. 170). This is Latour's infra-reflexivity which involves a *deflation* of method, a doing away with the 'paraphernalia of methodological precautions', which apart from anything else, he points out, makes many academic texts so unappealing, if not impossible, to read. Latour asks

> instead of piling layer upon layer of self-consciousness to no avail, why not just have one layer, the story, and obtain the necessary amount of reflexivity from somewhere else. After all, journalists, poets and novelists are not naive make-believe constructionists. They are much more subtle, devious and clever than self-conscious methodologists. They did not have to wait for post-modern writing to tell stories; they are as self-conscious as those who naively believe they are *more* self conscious. Instead of saying that precautions should be taken either to recover the lived world of the competent member or to render the text unusable for make-believe consumption, ***just offer the lived world and write***. Isn't that what novelists have done for three centuries? (p. 170, last emphasis added).

Latour explains that such an approach should entail, amongst other things, 'replacing methodology with style' ... 'self-exemplification instead of self-reference' ...'writing non-scientific texts'...'cross-over instead of meta-language'...and ...'hybridization instead of disciplinary boundaries' (pp. 170-175), some of which are touched upon below.

Faith in the writing of stories as a means of conducting knowledge has emerged on a number of fronts. Rorty (1989) feels that the progress we have always sought through (philosophical) theory, in fact will be provided by 'genres such as ethnography, the journalist's report, the comic book, the docudrama, and, especially the novel' (p. xvi), and that the sharp distinctions drawn between philosophy and literature are in fact false and should be abandoned. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), have explored the parallels between fictional, and non-fictional (particularly, ethnographic) writing and conclude that 'there is nothing which totally distinguishes fictional from non-fictional writing' (p. 241), and that it is vital that

those practising ethnography should be aware of the armoury of literary techniques and styles if they are to effectively express their research in the process of writing. Game (1991) proposes that 'we think of sociological writing as fiction and fiction as social analysis' (p. 18) and suggests that knowledge claims are assessed in terms of 'analysis understood as reading and writing of texts, that breaks with the reality-fiction opposition' (p.3). Such orientations can be seen as part of, or parallel to, 'the literaturization of the social sciences' (Loriggio, 1990, cited by Peter McLaren (1992), but Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) caution 'do not assume' that the work of a novelist 'is the equivalent of thoroughly researched, explicitly documented, and, theoretically developed scholarship' (p. 243).

VALIDITY

Latour (1988) and Denzin (1994) both see what Latour would term scientific (academic) texts as trying to validate themselves by denying their writings, their authoredness, and by the use of the careful and systematic applications of rules which are conduits of external (validating) truth into the text. According to Denzin (1994) 'Such moves cling to the conception of a "world-out-there" that is truthfully and accurately captured by the researcher's methods....A text is valid if it is sufficiently grounded, triangulated, based on naturalistic indicators, carefully fitted to theory, comprehensive in scope, credible in terms of member checks' (p. 297). But all these manoeuvres are 'rules which allow the text to bear witness to its own validity' (ibid), and such forms of validity are used to back claims to authority (Lather, 1993), and the exercise of power over the reader and the world described. This point is forcefully taken up by Scheurich (1996) who feels

> The heart of the Western knowledge project...is research. The purpose of research is to study the world (the Other), organise the world through a theory (re-form or re-shape the Other into the same, and produce a written text communicating the victory of the Same over the Other (p. 54).

Validity of research in the form of inscriptive narrative(s) comes through judgement. It is not constructed simply through links with the field site, the empirical world, rather it is constructed in the processes of reading, and how it fits in to the contexts of other texts and probably other forms of knowledge. As Latour (1988) states 'my own text is in your hands and lives or dies through what you will do to it' (p. 171). Its validity is in how it is judged and responded to. The point of trying to write openly, reflexively, and to set out conceptualisations adopted and methodologies employed, is to make the work as transparent as possible in terms of its construction, and therefore judicable on a broad and fair a basis as is possible. Latour also states that

'no *privilege* is asked for the account at hand' (171, emphasis added), but he does want his account - and I mine - to be taken seriously. To this end Latour says he will 'muster all available allies, all linguistic possibilities', and that generally 'all the literary resources that can be mustered to render an account lively, interesting, perceptive, suggestive and so on have to be present' (p. 170). The problem is to convince the reader of any text to take it seriously.

1.6.3 Relativism and Pragmatism

I have already turned to the work of Rorty for some of the positions I am trying to set out here. This is symptomatic of the generally pragmatist stance I have tried to set out, so finally I explore this further because the neo-pragmatism of Rorty (1989, 1991a, 1991b), and the provocative pragmatism of West (1988) and Emel (1991), offer an approach which takes on board many of the critical insights of postmodernism and poststructuralism but which maintains a basis for progressive radical outlook which escapes the supposed trap of relativism which many feel postmodernism in particular falls into. It helps to clarify how knowledge that does not claim privilege should be taken seriously.

Livingstone (1994), Goodman (1995), and Putnam (1995) have all charted the revival of interest in pragmatism. Putnam (1995) turns to the work of the early Pragmatists, Pierce, Dewey, but most notably James whose work 'has been too long neglected', for it 'points to ways out of philosophical "binds" that continue to afflict us' (p.6). In particular he feels pragmatism 'offers something far better than the unpalatable alternatives which too often seem to be the only possibilities today, both philosophically and politically' (p.5). And it is clear that within such possibilities Putnam includes 'post-modernism'. Bernstein (1991), Wheeler (1993), and Rorty (1989), show how pragmatism contains many of the key facets of postmodern thought, but does not end up in the intellectual/ethical cul-de-sac which often is seen as the inevitable denouement of post-Nietzschean thought (as Rorty, 1991c puts it). This is particularly so of 'provocative pragmatism' which Emel calls for in the face of theoretical and institutionalized academic stultification. This is directly drawn from the work of West (1989) who claims that this form of pragmatism, 'accepts the insights of post-structuralism and is energized by them rather than made radically skeptical' (p.385). Its pluralism, fallibilism, recognition of the contingency of self, knowledge, and truth bear the hallmarks of the latter, but its

response to these, is a romantic, optimistic, engaged stance which also confronts tragedy and evil, which it sees the contingency of self and knowledge as an escape, an opening, rather than a capture and termination.

Here I want to suggest that pragmatism can be seen as a theory about theory. Most commonly pragmatists would say theories should be seen as tools rather than truths. Rather than judge theory or language statements by their correspondence to the truth, judge them by the consequences they may bring about, their usefulness. Of course this begs the question of what is useful or desirable. But this shift in emphasis, although subtle could have profound implications. It makes the questions we ask immanent to our lives. As MacNeice (1988) put it in the poem 'London Rain' - 'We need no metaphysics / To sanction what we do' (p. 72). Holding 'a mirror up to nature', trying to truly reflect what is out there is, the pragmatists would say, impossible and also useless. Accusations of relativism, and ethical collapse which have always been aimed at pragmatism, like they have postmodernism, come crowding in here, but I suggest these approaches have the high ground on issues of relativism rather than the reverse. This is the point Dear (1995) makes in defending the postmodern project against the realist challenge as posed by Graham (1995) -

> I believe Graham is wrong when she asserts that 'if the postmodern project is to be furthered, the realist challenge must be answered'. Exactly the reverse is the case; *to be taken seriously, realism (or, for that matter, any other epistemology) is obliged to deal with postmodernism. Realism is simply one of a number of competing truth claims, and advocates must expect to defend the claim that theirs is the privileged perspective* (emphasis added)...I realize that such a defense *can* be made, and that realism might garner a privileged niche; but such hegemony is inevitably and always temporary, local, and conditional. Understand that this is *not* a perspective which elevates postmodernism to the status of a new metanarrative, as many critics have gleefully contended. Rather, it is an ontological stance that engages the multiplicities in our ways of seeing, refuses hegemony and permanent closure in intellectual debate, and seeks deliberately to confront the contested nature of understanding and choice (p. 180)

The position that Dear takes is basically what Bauman (1993) terms 'postmodern wisdom' which 'does not expect anymore to find the all-embracing, total and ultimate formula of life without ambiguity, risk danger and error' (p. 245). Inevitably such wisdom Bauman suggests, is not a supplier of easy answers, it is always difficult to practice. Pragmatism offers a legacy of thought and example about the practice of such postmodern wisdom. Dewey (1982) - still one of the most influential figures in pragmatism - in an account of its early development, tells how James in an essay of 1907, using the terms Monism and Pluralism, argued that the former, representing what could now be termed essentialist meta-narratives, built a rigid picture of the universe 'where everything is fixed and immutably united to others',

thus sacrificing the 'concrete and complex diversity of things'. The pluralism James advanced, allowed for these, and for 'contingency', and did not attempt to 'force the vast diversity of events and things into a single rational mold' (p.29). This recognition, Durkheim (1983) suggested in 1913, of 'the contrast between the confused complexities of reality and the characteristics of logical thought' was a key feature of pragmatism and its attack on rationalism. Here I see Philo's suggestions for a sensitization of rural studies via, amongst other avenues, the methodological eclecticism that he saw in Colin Ward's 'The Child in The Country', as being in tune with these elements of pragmatism. If the world is complexly and messily plural in nature then flexible, experimental multi dimensional approaches are needed to try and engage with it.

The theoretical orientations set out above I have tried to apply in this work, I hope they can sustain the subsequent text.

NOTE ON THE USE OF VISUAL MATERIAL

It will now be clear that there is quite a high degree of visual material in this work. This again, has personal antecedents. The three previous dissertations I have written have all been highly illustrated, and this is tied in with my visual arts training and on-going practice of photography. The world is as much a construction of visual signs as it is of text, to remain in the territory of text alone is to miss out on the particular forms and content of narratives which visual signs carry, and which cross-cut with the textual. This could not be more so in the cases of countryside and childhood. Our understanding and constructions of countryside are deeply enmeshed with visual (in fact sensory) representations and responses to views and images. The same can be said of childhood. Holland (1992), in her survey of 'popular images of childhood' gives a powerful account of the significance of visual representations of childhood

> Pictures on the page or screen, easy and unempathetic in their omnipresence and attractiveness, feed comfortably into the common sense of our age. They express emotion, challenge or confirm ideas, re-present to us the world and our place in it...They form a populous world of two dimensions, threaded through our living world of flesh and blood...This kaleidoscope...is also an irremovable part of the way we make our meanings. We use it to name the world and to position individuals in different ways within that world. Children hold a special place in this imagery of our times. The engaging smile, the mischievous grin, the pout, the tear, the expression of joys forgotten to adulthood - we greet these beguiling pictures with a special sort of pleasure as they circulate in the public spaces of our decaying inner cities, our spruced-up country towns and our suburban shopping parades. Childhood lends itself to spectacular presentation... The images circulate between the media, echoing back and forth, from newspapers to advertisement, from the pages of magazines to postcards, packing and wrapping paper...A repertoire of reference and self-refinance is built up. Groups of pictures cluster together, gaining meaning from their proximity and their continuous reference to each other.. (There is) an attempt to buttonhole

> viewers, to pin them down and trap them within a limited field of meaning...we find attempts to secure meanings within a structure of power and establish their own meaning of truth (pp. 8, 9.)... Our most personal stories, our memories, the tales we tell ourselves about ourselves, are shaped and inflected by the public images and public narratives we have available to us. These stories become our stories, these pictures our pictures (p. 11).

1.7 SUMMARY OF FOLLOWING CHAPTERS

I now give a very brief summary of the remainder of this dissertation, in order to orientate the reader as to its remaining form. This summary does not itemise each major point which are made subsequent chapters, and which form the chapter sub sections, rather I try to show the purpose and the basic content pertaining to that purpose, for each Chapter. The remainder of the dissertation is split into 2 parts.

Part One consists of chapter s 2, 3 and 4, and deals essentially with 'culture wide', or popular discourses of country childhood, childhood and urban childhood.
In Chapter 2 my aim is to establish both the breadth, depth and main characteristics of popular notions of country childhood idylls. This is in effect an attempt to unpack this major yet complex structuring force of rural children's (and others) into some of its constitutive elements. This enables it to be considered in more detail and in terms of its historical legacy, its contemporary nature, and the differential nature of the structuring it imposes, and also the extent to which it may reflect lived country childhoods, or significantly, be more a product of adult idealisation and projection. This is done by considering a whole range of (mostly) popular/literary portrayals of the countryside as an idyll for childhood, for here can be found the purified, and iconic accounts of idyll, and also through their persistent frequency they demonstrate the powerful pervasiveness of such ideas.

Chapter 3 then considers a whole range of discourses which run counter to this notion of country childhood idyll. Firstly some of the texts used in Chapter 2 are reconsidered in order to show that even in the most vivid and powerful expressions of country childhood idyll there are in fact glimpses of other less idyllic childhoods and also traces of the degree of adult idealisation and projection which might be shaping these stories. These range from questioning the validity of the rural as a valid form of analysis in contemporary Britain, to questioning the validity of contemporary constructions of childhood. In between these extremes there are other fields of discourses which in some direct or indirect way challenge the notion of country childhood idyll. One such questions the rural as being an idyll, in any form; another, related set of themes are concerned with the 'erosion' of even death

of childhood in general. Critically within these expressions of concern, there is a set which relate specifically to the condition of rural childhood, and these are mostly framed in the approach that various (potential) problems for rural children are masked by the overriding notion that the countryside is an idyllic childhood environment.

Chapter 4 then switches attention to the urban, and particularly children in the urban, for it is vital to address how constructions of the rural are (re)produced in the context of comparisons with the urban. I will show that the urban is often portrayed as a childhood distopia, with the rural as an (often unarticulated) positive other. This set of discourses, which sometimes uses children to illustrate urban crisis, and often uses the urban to illustrate childhood crisis, mostly overwhelms the more specialist discourses which question notions of country childhood idyll set out in Chapter 3, and thus helps sustain the powerful construction of the rural as a childhood idyll.

The focus now shifts to the local, empirical, element of the dissertation which forms Part Two, In Chapter 5, I set out the details of the case study village in which I consider the applications and implications of these discourses of childhood and the structuring they may have on children's lives in a particular place. The selection of my home village as a research site is considered and also the methodological techniques for research with adults/parents in the village are set out.

In Chapter 6, I give a quite detailed description of the village in both social and physical terms. This serves the purpose of grounding the subsequent elements of the dissertation, and also contains an indicative landscape survey, which questions some of the key assumptions of some discourses which are concerned with childhood in the countryside. Briefly, this revolves around the extent to which the countryside has been tidied up, and how the spaces which children may have used have been lost.

The first part Chapter 7 then attempts to portray how adults/parents 'see' childhood in the case study village and the rural more generally. This amounts to a reworking of some of the themes set out in Chapter 2, but shows how these specific adult constructions of country childhoods, are much more complex and contradictory them the more 'pure' form found in popular expression. Notions of idyll are still

pervasive but are fractured by intrusions of other constructions of contemporary childhood set out in Chapter 3 and 4, particularly, how fear has restricted childhood everywhere, including, the case study village. The Second part of Chapter 7, then tries to consider how these constructions of childhood in the village actually have a palpable structuring effect on the village children's lives.

In chapter 8 an exploratory attempt is made to consider the village and children's lives within it from the children's point of view. This is an extremely problematic task, and thus has its own separate section of methodological consideration. Attempts are made to distil some key issues of child/environment relationships and relate these to the village and the rural more generally.

As a conclusion, Chapter 9, (re)considers a number of conceptual themes which emerge through the research and which seem to be fertile grounds in which to consider the extremely complex interaction of childhood and adult geographies (in the rural in this case) which are at the heart of how children's worlds are experienced from within and structured from without'.

PART ONE

DISCOURSES OF COUNTRY CHILDHOOD: CONSTRUCTING AND QUESTIONING COUNTRY/ CHILDHOOD/ IDYLLS

> English literature abounds in the kind of autobiographical novel in whose opening chapter our young hero (for it is seldom a heroine) is seen in the ancient small-town grammar school, daydreaming of the woods and fields....Once let out of school, his real life begins - wandering by river banks and up through the spinney and copse to the hilltops, observing nature with a learning eye and absorbing the wisdom of shepherd and gamekeeper, forester and farrier... and from the scary old hermit whose tumbledown cottage is really a treasure trove of country lore....Moralists and educators, all through history....have polarized the country and the city as environments for children and have concluded that, however much the city may be a necessary provider of civilized life for sophisticated adults, nature is the only true teacher and that there is something 'authentic' or 'organic' about rural childhood. (Ward 1990, pp. 17/19).

Chapters 2, 3 and 4, which form the first part of the work to come, are three takes on childhood in the countryside and how it is constructed in a number of discourses which are, to varying degrees, at large in our national culture(s). (I pluralise culture in the recognition that our 'national culture' is, in fact, fragmented rather than hegemonic). Essentially these discourses are - constructions of the countryside as a childhood idyll - discourses which are questioning or plainly critical of this idea in direct or more oblique ways - and finally discourses which see the urban as a childhood distopia and which explicitly or implicitly reinforce notions that the countryside is the natural and best location for children. To explore these discourses I turn to the arenas where they are most in evidence and where they are most forcefully and comprehensively displayed. Thus for discourses of country childhood idyll, I turn to literature, media, and children's literature. For what I am calling counter idyll discourses, I turn to mainly to the various academic, professional/policy, and media discourses which are couched in terms which directly set out to question notions of country childhood idylls. Finally in Chapter 4 I turn to mainly print media discourses which, in response to what is seen as 'the urban/childhood crisis' have turned out a steady and highly consistent flow of text and images which show the urban as a childhood distopia. In part 2, these discourses are re-examined in the context of a case study of a particular village setting.

CHAPTER 2

CONSTRUCTIONS OF COUNTRY CHILDHOODS: EVOCATIONS, LAMENTATIONS AND POPULAR DISCOURSES

In this chapter my aim is to explore adult ideas of country childhood which abound in various strands of cultural discourses, but particularly literature, media, and children's literature and products. The reasons for using such discourses it that they represent country childhood idylls in their purest or most refined form which makes the unpacking of their anatomy more feasible, and because they exist, as generalized structuring discourses, in a complex interrelationship with individualized discourses, both constituting and being constituted by them in an on going relationship. Through these I hope not only to reveal more clearly the presence of ideas of country childhoods within our culture(s) but also to unpack the differing elements which constitute them. Through this I intend to reveal in more detail what adult expectations and assumptions about country childhoods are, as a step in the process of assessing the consequences of these assumptions for children themselves.

Ward (1990) states that time and again in discussion with teachers and social workers about children's environmental experiences, it emerged that contemporary childhood, especially contemporary urban childhood, was constantly being judged in the context of a mostly unarticulated but nevertheless powerful idea of the ideal rural childhood. He also felt that the experiences of rural children themselves were concealed behind these popular discourses that suffuse our culture. Thus his declared motivation for writing *The Child in the Country* was to try and see through these assumptions and to report on the realities of country childhoods today. As a result of this approach, he only gives glimpses of what adult constructions of country childhood idylls consist of, and concentrates more on the experiences of today's rural children. I feel it is important to look more closely at the nature of these constructions of idyll because it is the images, ideas and expectations which they generate which play a critical role in forming adult interpretations of rural and urban childhoods, and these interpretations are shaping influences on the various ways in which rural children's worlds are structured.

I have already claimed that ideas of the rural and ideas of childhood are profusely and intricately present within our culture(s). This is also so where they overlay each other in ideas of country childhoods. But it cannot somehow be expected to clinically remove an entire entity such as 'the discourse of country childhood' - and then display it like some organ in a jar of formaldehyde - in a work such as this. In the first instance it cannot be expected that there is a completely clear and distinct discourse of country childhood to be removed. Popular and lay discourses cannot be seen as coherent entities, but rather much more disjointed, incoherent, and chaotic bundles of images and ideas within which there will be contradicting and contested elements, which may stem from regional, class, gender, ethnic, and other differences. Secondly, popular discourses are always reinterpreted and given expression through individuals and groups and such fractally nuanced layers of meaning can never be captured, held and displayed by academic discourses.

But I do feel it is possible within the context of this work to explore and discuss ideas of country childhoods as popular cultural discourses, in that there will be common themes, and dominant themes which are identifiable and also, importantly, icons which can be seen as focal points within the flux of popular discourses. So what I am presenting here are fragments of discourses which I, and others, notably Ward (1990), feel are expressive of larger terrains, and in some way represent quintessential characteristics of popular discourses of country childhood. To put it another way, even though the full extent and variation of such discourses are ultimately untraceable, there are identifiable cores and themes which can be considered.

At this juncture I want to raise a major uncertainty which this and other works concerning country childhood, and childhood more generally, have to face. That is - to what extent is the childhood countryside idyll largely a matter of adult nostalgia and wish fulfillment which has never really been a matter of childhood reality? - *or* - to what extent is the childhood country idyll some form of reality, which may still be manifest or which has now been eroded away by changes to the countryside, childhood and society more generally? This is a question that is a sub-theme to this work, and will be considered more closely in later chapters. For now it can be left in the air, for which ever perspective the issue is approached from, it is the country

childhood idyll, be it a matter of dreams or present or past reality - or a complex combining of all three - which needs to be explored. Many versions of country childhoods often become either evocations of the idyll, or lamentations for the idyll lost. Initially it is the idyll, lost or otherwise, which I hope to illuminate below.

In what follows I attempt to reveal what I see as being the common characteristics of adult constructions of country childhood idylls using a number of textual sources which range through novels, autobiographies, non-fiction, children's books and television programs, newspaper and magazine articles. Some books such as Laurie Lee's (1959, 1962[1]) *Cider with Rosie* and Flora Thompson's (1945, 1973) *Lark Rise to Candleford* are referred to a number of times. These works are not only eloquent personal recollections of country childhoods, but in their popularity, have struck a chord within (sectors of) national sentiment and also become sources of country childhood idylls themselves, as they are read by subsequent generations. Both are on the national curriculum reading list and have been in print since first being published. Ward (1990) 'wonders if their popularity among teachers is precisely because they promote a picture of a purified identity of rural childhood, uncontaminated by urban influences which muddy and confuse the image' (p.18), while Humphries, Mack and Perks (1988) suggest -

> novels and autobiographies such as Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise to Candleford* and Laurie Lee's *Cider with Rosie* celebrate the richness and spontaneity of children's play in the unspoiled countryside of old England. This is often the yardstick by which the decline in children's games is measured (p. 62).

Other works I will refer to have, in some cases, long since fallen out of fashion and out of print, and therefore cannot be said to be directly interacting with public opinion in the ongoing formation of discourse like those above, but they do turn out to be pivotal works in the development of the literary and cultural legacies which underpin 'child in the countryside' images. One notable example being *Bevis* by Richard Jefferies (1882), the story of a country boyhood, which along with other works by the same writer, was read by a number of authors and was quoted as an inspiration for their own childhood and their subsequent literary portrayals of such. There is a strong, but not exclusive, emphasis on literary portrayals of country childhoods, but, as Ward (1990) considers such 'stereotypes' are 'intensely literary

---

[1] In references given with two dates, the first corresponds to the first date of publication and the second to the edition used for reference. This is done when the date of original publication is considered significant in terms of the historical development and context of texts involved.

in origin' (p.18). Again I stress such accounts as these not only reflect but, critically, also contribute to the ongoing constructions of cultural discourses of country childhoods. Furthermore, for the purpose of this work, to explore how adults, in the form of the various authors, see and recount their own and other people's childhoods, gives insights, not so much into children's worlds, but into adult views and adult recollections of children's worlds. Drabble (1984) has noted in her exploration of the relationship between English literature and place, that many writers reveal 'a passionate attachment to the places of childhood' (p.7) and most 'return again and again to childhood, seeing in a pond, a field, a tree, a church some reminder of what they once were' (p.8). So such works seem compelling sources for the exploration of how adults see country childhoods.

Of course linkages between human geography and literature are not new and the dynamics of such have been aired on a number of occasions. Johnson (1986) points out that there is a trend within humanistic approaches to geography of linking up with the humanities and with literature. He refers to Meinig's argument that geography should both draw from and contribute to literature, and that Pocock, and others, have demonstrated that literature provides 'essential clues about human experience with the environment', and also that 'writers not only describe the world, they help shape it. Their very portrayals establish powerful images that affect public attitudes about our landscapes and regions' (p. 76). You only have to consider the influence the romantic poets have had on the public perception of The Lake District, or the strong association Thomas Hardy, the Bronte's, Mary Webb and many others have with the landscapes they set their work in, to appreciate this is so.

Cloke, Philo and Sadler (1991), also refer to Pocock as they consider links between 'humanistic geography and literature', which they see as a developing branch of the subject which has become 'commonplace', (e.g. Mallory and Simpson-Housley). They conclude that,

> from literature geographers are concerned both with imaginative 'word pictures', the ability of writers to weave pictures in words that somehow capture the 'flavour' of a place, and with the more profound sense that writers occasionally convey of how the humanity of a particular people is intimately bound up with the natural and built surroundings in which these people exist (p.82).

They also refer to Daniels (1985, p.149), criticism of this type of study, and add a note of caution themselves, both of which are concerned with the over reliance on what is in fact the literary skills of the author. This is a valid caution, and I would

stress that the use of literature, art and other texts should not be solely relied upon to reveal peoples' attitudes towards the places in which they grew up, or anything else for that matter. But rather it should be seen as part of our collective cultural reactions to and constructions of these places which merits attention in its own right, and also as possible indicators of attitudes and feelings that should be explored in the context of various empirical qualitative methods. Gregory (1994) explores these areas, and particularly the work of Meinig as a means of considering the relationships between description and analysis, theory and evocation, science and art within humanistic geography. He feels that denial of theory for the sake of art, or the reverse, not only refuses the way that they are already mixed up, but also the value they add to each other. Happily (from my perspective) he chooses to illustrate how human geography can effectively become literature, - and evoke what is perhaps not theorizable- by choosing Pierce Lewis's powerful description of a *childhood* engagement with a wild country place.

In the next two sections I suggest that many adult constructions of country childhood idylls can be classified as either evocations, which recall and portray idylls; or lamentations, which portray idylls now lost. In section 2.3 I draw a distinction between adult stories about country childhoods and adult stories (and products) for children which have country themes and settings, this latter group also revealing the positive association between childhood and the countryside. In section 2.4 I then try to identify some of the key components of constructions of country childhood idyll, notably, innocence, health, nature, adventure and freedom. In the last section I attempt to put these constructions in a spatial framework in order to link them to debates within geography and also those concerned with the loss of childhood spaces.

2.1 EVOCATIONS

There are many examples of autobiographical memories and stories which recount childhood days spent in the countryside. These range vastly in type from glossy magazine articles to what have become to be considered great works of literature. Initially I take a passage from one of the latter - Laurie Lee's *Cider with Rosie* - as a seminal example of such which captures many of the attributes of country childhood idyll.

> When darkness fell and the huge moon rose, we stirred to a second life. Then boys went calling along the roads, wild slit-eyed animal call, Walt Kerry's naked nasal yodel, Boney's jackal scream. As soon as we heard them we crept outdoors, out of our stifling bedrooms, stepped out into the moonlight warm as the sun to join our chalk-white, moon-masked gang.
>
> Games in the moon. Games of pursuit and capture. Games that the night demanded. Best of all Fox and Hounds - go where you like, and the whole of the valley to hunt through. Two chosen boys loped away through the trees and were immediately swallowed in shadow. We gave them five minutes, then set out after them. They had churchyard, farmyard, barns, quarries, hilltops, and woods to run to. They had all night, and the whole of the moon and five miles of country to hide in ....
>
> Padding softly, we ran under the melting stars, through sharp garlic woods, through blue blazed fields, following the scent by the game's one rule, the question answer and cry. Every so often, panting for breath, we pause to check on our quarry. Bullet heads lifted, teeth shone in the moon.
>
> 'Whistle-or-'OLLER! Or-we-shall-not FOLLER!' It was a cry on two notes, prolonged. From the other side of the hill, above the white fields of mist, the faint fox-cry came back. We were off again then, through the waking night, among sleepless owls and badgers, while our quarry slipped off into another parish and would not be found for hours (p. 153).

Here children are playing together, outdoors, with extensive spatial freedom, and freedom from adult supervision. They are free to roam and have wild yet innocent, healthy adventures, in a traditional agricultural landscape containing elements of nature, with little risk and no fear.

Such literature makes up a key part of the tradition of 'rural writing' [2] and it is easy to find new examples of this kind of evocation. For example Dirk Bogarde's 1992 autobiographical novel, *The Great Meadow: an evocation*, bears on the (1993) paperback edition the following summary, aimed at enticing purchase,

> From 1927 to 1934 the young Dirk Bogarde lived in a remote cottage in the Sussex Downs with his sister Elizabeth and their strict nanny, Lally. For the children it was an idyllic time of joy and adventure: of gleaning at the end of summer, of oil lamps and wells, of harvests and harvest mice in the Great Meadow.

My claim that such notions of country childhood idylls can be seen as a distinct sub-theme to more general ideas of rural idyll can be backed by various examples of it being a sub-text within various texts on rural idyll. For example, Joanna Trollope (1993) in her anthology of writing which 'celebrates our country habit', makes 'Childhood' one of her chapter headings under which she organizes her selections from prose, verse and diaries etc. Such juxtapositions can also be found in rural lifestyle magazines such as 'Country Living', whose spine always bears the legend 'When Your Heart is in The Country'. Since this magazine was launched in the

---

[2] Keith (1975) gives good account of the 'rural tradition' in English literature, and today this genre has become distinctive and common enough to merit a 'Rural Writing' section in the larger Waterstones book shops.

summer of 1985 each monthly edition has carried the regular feature 'My Country Childhood' in which the great and the good (and the not so great and not so good) reminisce about their country childhoods (fig 2.1). Apart from such regular items other more occasional series of articles and one off articles and images appear. Fig 2.2 shows the cover of an edition of 'This England' (Summer, 1991) which depicts children picking flowers in a wood, and fig 2.3 shows an illustrated motif which is used to introduce an occasional series of articles about children in the countryside in the magazine 'Country Life'. As Shurmer-Smith and Hannam (1994) point out, there has been a 'marked proliferation of rural lifestyle magazines', which can be seen as indicative of the powerful cultural capital invested in images of the rural in the British context, and this has been fueled 'as people with urban generated wealth' buy into 'the rural idyll' (pp. 195, 196), and I would add, the rural childhood idyll.

To what extent such evocations should be taken as relatively straight forward accounts of actual lived childhoods, or more complex adult constructions is a major theme of this work, for if the fabric of such discourses is largely a matter of adult construction then the implications for how we see children in the country, and in urban areas, needs to be unraveled. Humphries, Mack and Perks (1988) consider that 'there is some truth' in these evocations of 'natural' play

> For despite the fact that most country children had no money and few toys, they could enjoy climbing, fishing, hunting and picking wild fruit - all for free. The migration to the cities, and decades of agricultural depression, had left a picturesque landscape with many a ruined barn and rambling hedge for children to play in. In rural areas the countryside became, in children's eyes, a great adventure playground where their imagination could run wild, building tree dens, damming streams and raiding birds' nests (p.63).

Here, although there is some caution expressed over taking country childhood idylls at face value, the verdict is that it *was* some form of reality. The 'was' is not only pertinent in terms of its positive meaning but also its past meaning. The account is clearly considering past landscapes, but leaves the status of more contemporary rural child environment relationships open to doubt. But other writers have quite categorically lamented that the countryside childhood idyll was for real, and that it is now lost or being lost.

MY COUNTRY CHILDHOOD

Jane Gardam

I was born on the north-east coast of Yorkshire, a place I have often written about and still dream of. But that is not the landscape that has most influenced my life.

From the age of six months to 16 years I spent a large part of my time on my grandparents' farm in west Cumberland. My father was a schoolmaster in Yorkshire, very dedicated and a big personality, but his father on the opposite side of England expected him to come "home" and spend every day of his considerable holidays helping on the farm as he had done as a boy.

The farm was called Thornby End and lay between the Lake District and the Solway Firth. From my bedroom I looked east to purple Skiddaw with its little patch of perpetual snow. From the orchard behind the farm we looked north-west at the Scottish mountain Criffell, rising blue and hazy through the trees. The farm is a ruin now, the old limewashed stone buildings gone, and a nasty pink broken house I don't recognise stands in drab fields.

We reached the farm from Yorkshire in four different trains, the luggage sent on ahead and waiting for us at the nearest station, where my grandfather also waited in the farm cart. We trundled through the lanes until we reached a long white gate and a "lonning" running steep and straight down to a duck pond and a spinney, then steep and straight up again to the farm. In the duck-pond dip stood a rock the size of a small cottage that looked as if it was made of uncooked fruitcake mixture. It was quite unlike any other in the district, a weird magic thing maybe flung down by the moon. This, too, has disappeared.

At the top of the lonning stood my grandmother in beautiful long clothes, a black dress covered by a long black silk apron embroidered with violets, her collar a pie-dish frill of stiff muslin fastened with a gold brooch. Her hair was white and swept up like a duchess's. She wore black buttoned shoes and black woollen stockings. Her undergarments were much the same as the first Queen Elizabeth's. When she left the farm, which was almost never, she wore black kid gloves and a black straw hat tied under the chin with velvet. Once, she went to London and stopped the traffic in Piccadilly and my grandfather, in his high hat and wing collar, said, "What's all the people doing, Lizzie? Is there a fair on?" Beside my grandmother's bed stood a box like a coffin where she kept

The novelist Jane Gardam (left, and above aged five) won the 1991 Whitbread Best Novel of the Year Award with **The Queen of the Tambourine**

her best linen sheets and the clothes in which she was to be buried. I adored her.

I also adored the maid, Molly, with her gooseberry green eyes and black hair, who came to the farm at 14 and stayed until everybody was dead 50 years on. She worked harder than any of the men in the fields. She milked the cows twice a day, separated the cream, churned the butter, planted, dug and prepared the vegetables for table, looked after the garden, gathered the fruit, scoured and cleaned the house, washed, ironed, dealt with bedroom slops and hot water jugs for washing, helped with harvest and haymaking and at threshing times catered for a dozen ravenous, itinerant Irishmen. She was like a warm wood fire. She took the chicks to hatch from the incubator in her own room. She never married.

I was in delirious ecstasy at Thornby End from first thing in the morning, when I flew out of bed to go for the cows with Molly, until last thing at night by the kitchen fire, my father lying prone on the black settle, exhausted as the dogs who lay like rugs in the porch among the guns. My mother sat peering forwards to the lamplight to try to see well enough to sew. I was ignored on the farm. Nobody thought to entertain me. I drifted about. At five I often walked by myself to my uncle's farm three miles away over the fields. At nine I biked alone to the Solway between fat hedges full of yellowhammers like clouds of butterflies.

I don't remember exactly when I began to realise that life at Thornby End was often hard and horrible and that my grandparents were not happy. There was a series of dreadful harvests. There were no subsidies, insurance or state aid. My grandfather was poor, though much less poor than some. He had quarrelled with his father and been cut out of his will. My grandmother used to ration the paraffin for the lamps and walk four miles into Wigton to save tuppence on the bus. There was never any mechanisation on the farm, not even a tractor, no electricity, piped water, radio or telephone. The drinking water was pumped from a well full of bugs and my mother boiled every drop, to the derision of her in-laws. In winter the beautiful place ran with damp and ice covered the insides of the bedroom windows. Bedroom fires were for imminent death only. The food was all right, as no one had heard of additives and there was no fertiliser used on the farm until after the war, but it was plain, dreary and badly cooked. There was no book but the Bible, no music, no entertainment and nobody believed in holidays.

My mother hated every minute there. She had been very carefully brought up in a small Yorkshire town in a pious, slightly snobbish, middle-class family and educated in a convent. She hated the rough manners, the lewd farming jokes and the way they laughed at her la-di-da accent. How she must have loved my father to have stuck it out.

I think she was also infuriated by my great happiness there and my endless lament, "If only we lived here all the time." Once, when I was sitting snivelling in the train home at the end of summer, she threw a book at me that she had been keeping as a surprise. "Read this, you silly little thing." It was an anthology of First World War poems. I was 14 and that was young, but it turned out to be the right moment. I was set for another country. But of which poetry has been more precious to me, the printed or the experienced, I have no doubt.

The Iron Coast (£15), and Going into a Dark House *(£14·99), both by Jane Gardam, are published by Sinclair-Stevenson.*

Fig. 2.1 'My Country Childhood' - regular feature in Country Living magazine since its launch in 1985. Here, Jane Gardam (novelist) (OCT 1995) recalls-

...I was in delirious ecstasy...from first thing in the morning, when I flew out of bed to go for the cows with Molly, until last thing at night by the kitchen fire...I was ignored on the farm. Nobody thought to entertain me. I drifted about. At five I often walked by myself to my uncle's farm three miles over the fields. At nine I biked alone to the Solway between fat hedges full of yellowhammers like clouds of butterflies...

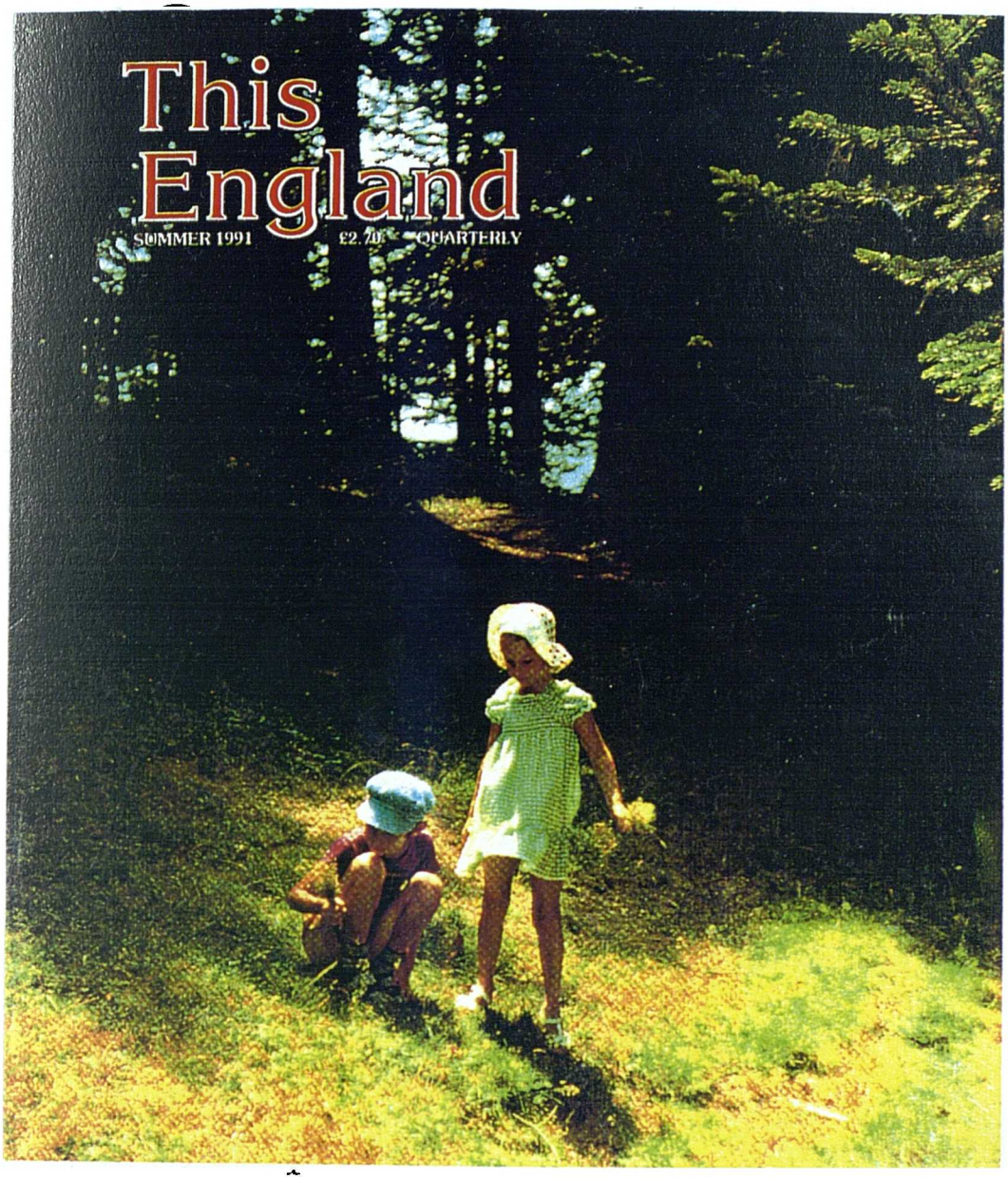


Fig. 2.2 Cover of 'This England' (Summer, 1991) with an idyllic view of children in the countryside.

74 COUNTRY LIFE • MAY 9, 1996

Fig 2.3 The Children in the Countryside motif used in 'Country Life' to identify occasional series of articles. (On this occasion 09 MAY 1996)

2.2 LAMENTATIONS

In some ways lamentations for country childhoods are more assertive in their claims to represent actual lived childhoods for they are concerned that such actuality has been lost. These lamentations not only imply that country children are now deprived of what was once an ideal environment in which to be and develop, but also that *all* childhoods are now second best to what was and what should be. Such discourses are considered more fully in Chapter 3 but a seminal example, that of Shoard (1980), is considered here for it clearly shows how such constructions see the countryside as being, or once being a childhood idyll.

Shoard's book *The Theft of the Countryside* (1980) is seen as a critical moment in the changing relationships between the countryside, agriculture and public opinion (Newby, 1985), (and is thus treated as part of popular discourse). In it Shoard pays particular attention to what she sees as the reduction of opportunity for children to live out the rural child idyll.

She claims that 'the countryside is of course a boundless treasure-house of opportunities for creative play, and one for which no real substitute has ever been found' (p.192). So here she sees the countryside as the ideal territory for childhood and implies that others, presumably including urban, where the vast majority of children now live, are second best. She goes on to support her stance by recounting a day spent with children from the village of Minster, who were 'adamant that the country was a much better place to play in than the street, the playground, the recreation ground with its grass, swings and slide, or even the seaside' (p.192). She also recounts how the children, in the past, had played mainly in the areas of marshes near the village to which they had 'de facto' access, but much of which had recently been lost to intensive agriculture, and the children now had to rely on 'several scraps of rough marginal land' which still remained. Interestingly, especially for the purposes of this work, Shoard goes on to analyze what it is that the children get from these places and suggests that the benefits can be divided into five categories.

> First, it provides a much greater variety of 'props', from bullrushes to spiders, long grasses (musical instruments as well as craft material) to snails. Second, the countryside provides much greater freedom of movement: not only does long grass make possible games like 'Soldiers': it also enables children to feel safe. They believe they can take a tumble while playing leapfrog, for instance, without hurting themselves. Third, the countryside provides a separate place to which they can retreat from their homes, or rather their parents' homes, in the village. The construction of little dens or miniature houses is a much favoured activity.

> Fourth, the animals of the countryside provide a rich source of enjoyment - watching birds, catching tadpoles, collecting spiders to frighten parents with, racing snails, letting grass snakes slither through the fingers, letting frogs bounce up and down in the hand. Finally, the countryside is a source of the unknown: it provides endless surprises and makes possible unexpected scrapes. Because there is so much to discover in the country, many of the children I spoke to were happy to spend time simply looking around, finding new places, stumbling across exciting, unusual things, getting into scrapes, skipping from one pursuit to another. Whereas woods, for example, are ideal for anything from playing hide-and-seek to chasing animals or playing stunts on bicycles, at the seaside all there is to do is swim and walk along the beach and make sandcastles' (p.193).

Shoard illustrates her concern that the opportunities children have for country play, and all the benefits it brings with it, are being eroded, with interview extracts from children whose favorite play places had been grubbed out or ploughed up in the processes of agricultural intensification. She concludes - 'across the countryside, this kind of devastation must already have changed the experience of childhood in England substantially' (p.193). So for Shoard the country childhood idyll is, or at least was a reality, and it was enabled by the physical attributes of the landscape, but changes to the landscape are increasingly reducing such opportunity.

Such lamentations are convinced of the idyllic nature of the 'traditional' countryside as a place of childhood, and consequently do form a critical discourse on the condition of contemporary country childhood, and this is explored in more detail in the next chapter, along with other discourses more questioning of the whole construction of country childhood idylls more generally.

2.3 STORIES *ABOUT* CHILDHOOD - STORIES *FOR* CHILDHOOD

Before I go on to explore in more detail the differing elements which I see as constituting 'the country childhood idyll' I want briefly to consider the distinction between stories about country childhoods and stories for childhood. The two examples just quoted are stories about childhood by adults and are mainly for adult audiences. They are plainly a source of material for exploring adult perceptions of children in the countryside. But I also want to consider, and draw upon, children's literature, television, and to a small extent, products.

There is a long and rich tradition of children's books, children's toys, and more recently children's television and video, which have the countryside for their subject and/or their setting. These are stories which adults have written for children, which adults have designed and marketed to appeal to children - and to the adults which

may buy them and pass them on to children as presents or in readings. This material reveals a deep cultural seam of positive association between children and the countryside/nature against which the particular individual accounts of country childhoods should be read. It also bears interactive agency within what I am calling popular discourses of the child in the countryside, either portraying stories about children in the countryside to children, via adults, or are about the sort of countryside we want our children to know about. There is a desire to shelter the joy and innocence of childhood from the harsher facets of many everyday lives, so in the search for stories which avoid these, it is the countryside which often becomes the setting. Thus these stories also can be taken as indicators of adult desires and expectations about country childhoods and childhood in general. Hunt (1994) suggests that the history of children's literature - 'often a neglected area' - 'reveals some common elements in what the adult sees as the essential children's book...there is a potent mixture of nostalgia (*often in the form of a **rural** or suburban arcadia)'* (p. xi, emphasis added). These works take on many differing forms and I initially explore some here again as scene setters for the more detailed discussions below.

A vivid example is the wonderful *William* stories of Richmal Crompton. These stories have become something of a national institution and are enjoyed by both adults and children. Each decade since the 1940's has seen these stories serialized in differing versions on television or radio by the BBC, the latest in 1994 attracting average viewing figures of 8 million, (Telegraph, 15 FEB 1995), and the cassette recording 'Just William 4' was the first spoken-word cassette to make it into the British album charts (Radio Times, 12-18 NOV 1994). The stories embody many elements of the country childhood idyll, children out together beyond the physical and imaginative reach of adults, whose adventures take them into woods, fields, caves, old barns, and various village locations. In fact they have such a sharply defined spatial element to them that from the 40 or so volumes of stories produced, a detailed map (Clements, 1990) has been constructed of William's village and the surrounding countryside within which the dramas unfold.

There are numerous other adventure story books which again have the countryside as their settings and which are now seen as enduring classics. The territory in which Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* unfolds is also depicted in a map (fig 2.4).

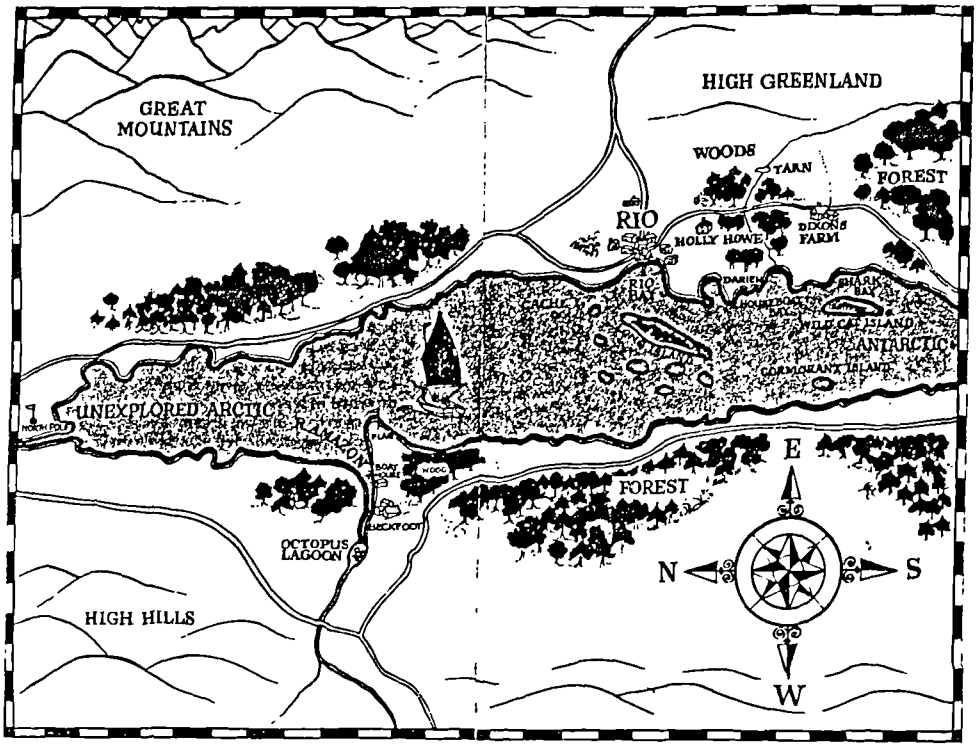


Fig 2.4 The territory in which Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* unfolds.

> it had its beginnings long, long ago when, as children, my brother , my sister and I spent most of our holidays on a farm at the south end of Coniston, we played in or on the lake or on the hills above...going away we were half drowned in tears...I could not help writing it. It almost wrote itself (Barrett, The Independent, 27 OCT 1990).

Not only does this work again portray a rural childhood idyll, but was according to the author, born out his own childhood experiences. Ransome wrote of the origins of the book that I can remember being enthralled in my childhood by other stories such as Masefield's *Box of Delight*, Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* , Garner's *The Owl Service*, which use rural settings to which is added a synthesis of nature, magic, history and adventures within time as well as space. Other immensely popular and successful works such as Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* series did come under much critical scrutiny which tarnished their reputations as children's classics but there can be little doubt that their enduring popularity can be seen as indications of, and contributions to, popular discourses of the countryside as a place of freedom and adventure for children. Illustrations from these books, such as the frontispiece of *Five on Finniston Farm* make it very clear what sort of landscapes these stories were set in, that is classic, bucolic English countryside.

Bunce (1994) points out that some children's classics are not only set in the countryside, but are peopled (mostly) by animal characters as well, thus deepening their association with nature and their states of innocence. The three which most readily spring to mind are Grahame's *Wind in the Willows* The Beatrix Potter stories,

and Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* stories[3]. Both *Wind in the Willows* and the *Winnie the Pooh* stories have maps of the territory they are set in, (fig 2.5, 2.5a), showing the importance of the imaginary spatialization of these texts within what are quintessentially rural settings; and the illustrations of the Beatrix Potter books give glimpses of the countryside in which they are set (fig 2.6). The success and the dissemination of such works is massive and global. 'Bookworm' (BBC1 Television, 1995) reported that Beatrix Potter books could be found in 80 million households worldwide. Similarly, Awdry's *Thomas the Tank Engine* books, which also have an idealized rural setting, have become 'an international money machine with an annual turnover of more than £1.2 billion' ('Profile', The Sunday Times, 19 NOV 1996)[4]. This emphasizes that these are not dying or fading contributions to

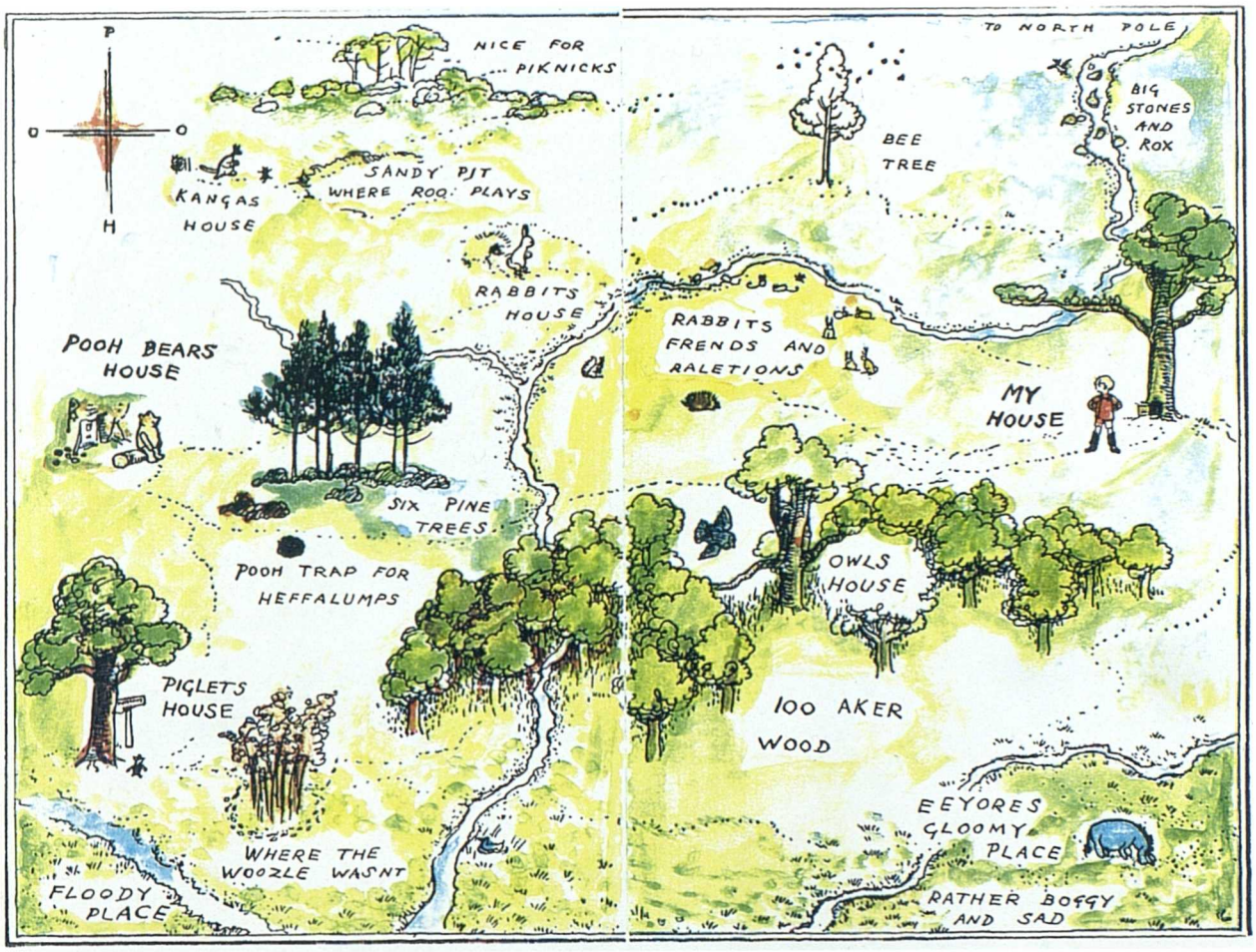


Fig 2.5 A map of the 100 acre wood, the setting of the *Winnie the Pooh* stories.

---

[3] Here the animals are toy animals adding yet another layer of innocence.

[4] This article points out that Britain dominates the global children book market and the list of products at the forefront of this domination comprises mainly of the rural based classics considered here.

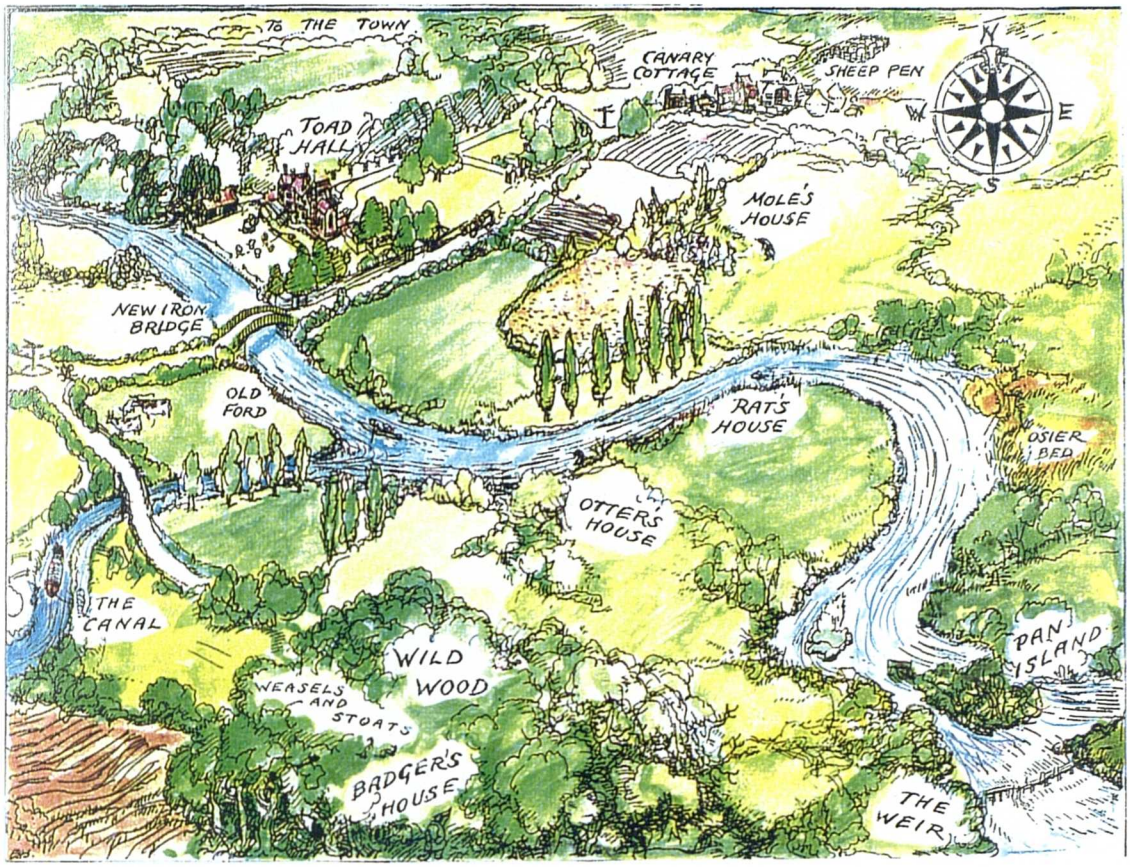


Fig. 2.5a Map of the setting of Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in The Willows.*

Fig 2.6 The view of the countryside from the top of Tom Kitten's chimney. *From The Tale of Samuel Whiskers* by Beatrix Potter, (1987), London F. Warne and Co.

children's literature and childhood countryside discourses; a visit to Blackwell's book shop in Bristol will find these products in the most prominent point of sales units within the children's book department. Furthermore they continue to unfold through new print products and other media. For example *The Willows in Winter* by Horwood, a sequel to *The Wind in the Willows* was published in 1993, and all these stories have undergone multiple transfers into television and video tape products, thus their consumption is not only sustained but increased. Often, through the nature of the medium of animated film, the landscapes in which they are set are 'brought to life' and shown in much greater detail than in the original works. Scenes form the television version of Potter's *Pigling Bland* and a loose adaptation of part of *The Wind in the Willows - Ratty and Mole's Christmas*, both screened during Christmas 1994, show beautifully drawn, 1990's re-tellings of the landscapes these stories were set in. This form of children's literature is not confined to 'classics' and re-worked classics alone. New texts which follow this well established pattern are themselves proving to be very popular, such as Adams' *Watership Down* (1973), and for younger children, *the Animals of Farthing Wood* stories (BBC Television and various publications) which emerged as having a 'loyal following' in a Media Guardian (8 AUG 1994) survey of the reading and watching habits of seven-year-old children.

Other stories such as *Postman Pat* which feature human characters also have deeply rural settings. Again scenes from the video collection of the television editions display countryside settings which are more developed and elaborate than in the book versions. Pat's van, within which he and Jess the cat drive through 'Greendale' meeting such rural adventures as stray sheep, tractor rides etc. (fig 2.7) now also 'trundles' within the concourses of thousands of supermarkets as children partake in the merchandising of this phenomenal publishing success story. Rural imagery is still a powerful element within the merchandising of children products in general, the children's products retail chain The Early Learning Centre, chose for the cover of its 1995-6 Autumn and Winter catalogue, a colourful rural set constructed from some of the products it retails (fig 2.8).

Postman Pat, and other countryside set stories, such as *Fourways Farm* (Channel 4) are the latest in a long lineage of children's television programs with countryside

Fig 2.7 Stills from Postman Pat video showing 'rural encounters' - herding stay sheep and passing a tractor in a narrow lane. (The Very Best of Postman Pat, BBC Enterprises Ltd, 1992).

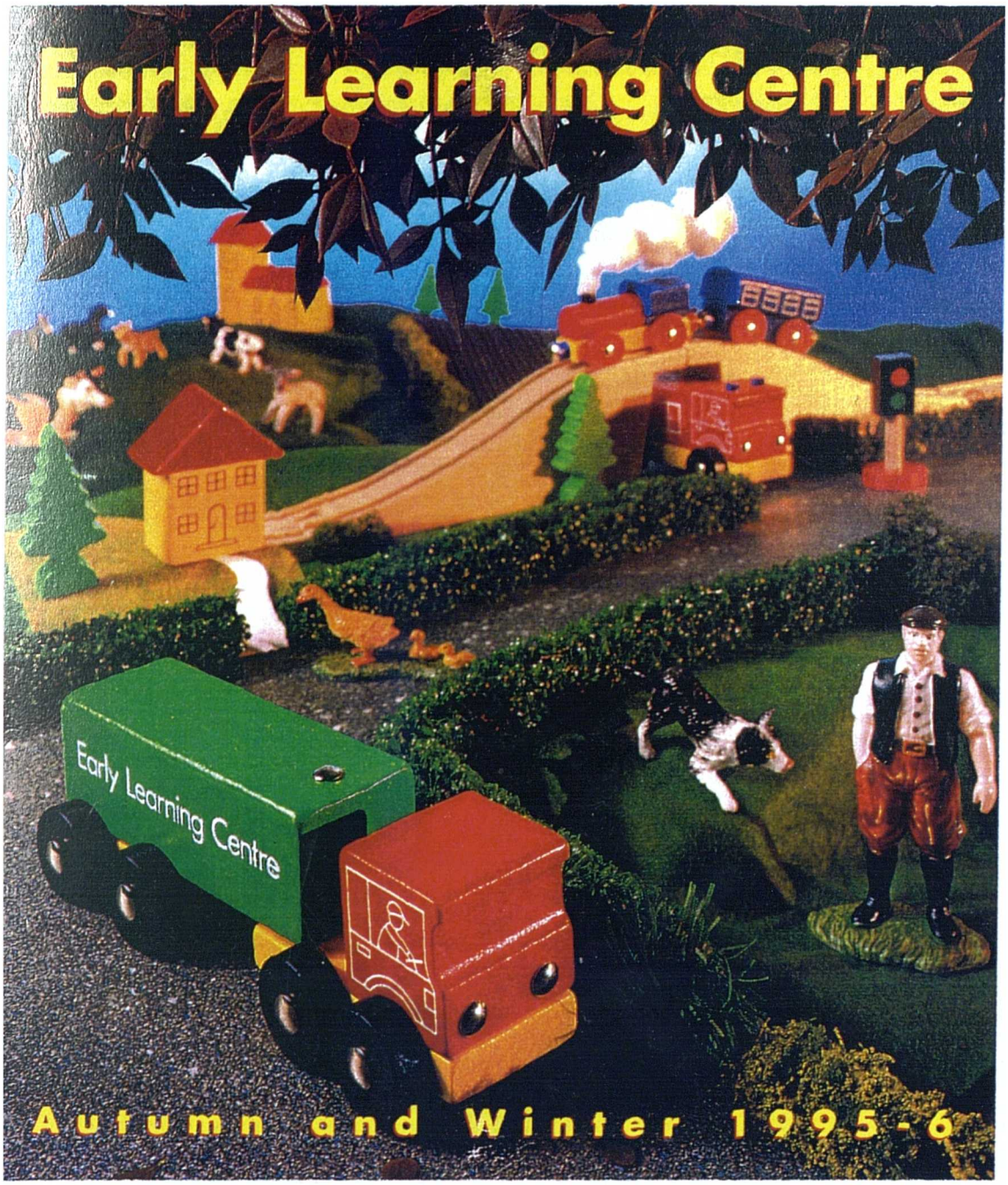
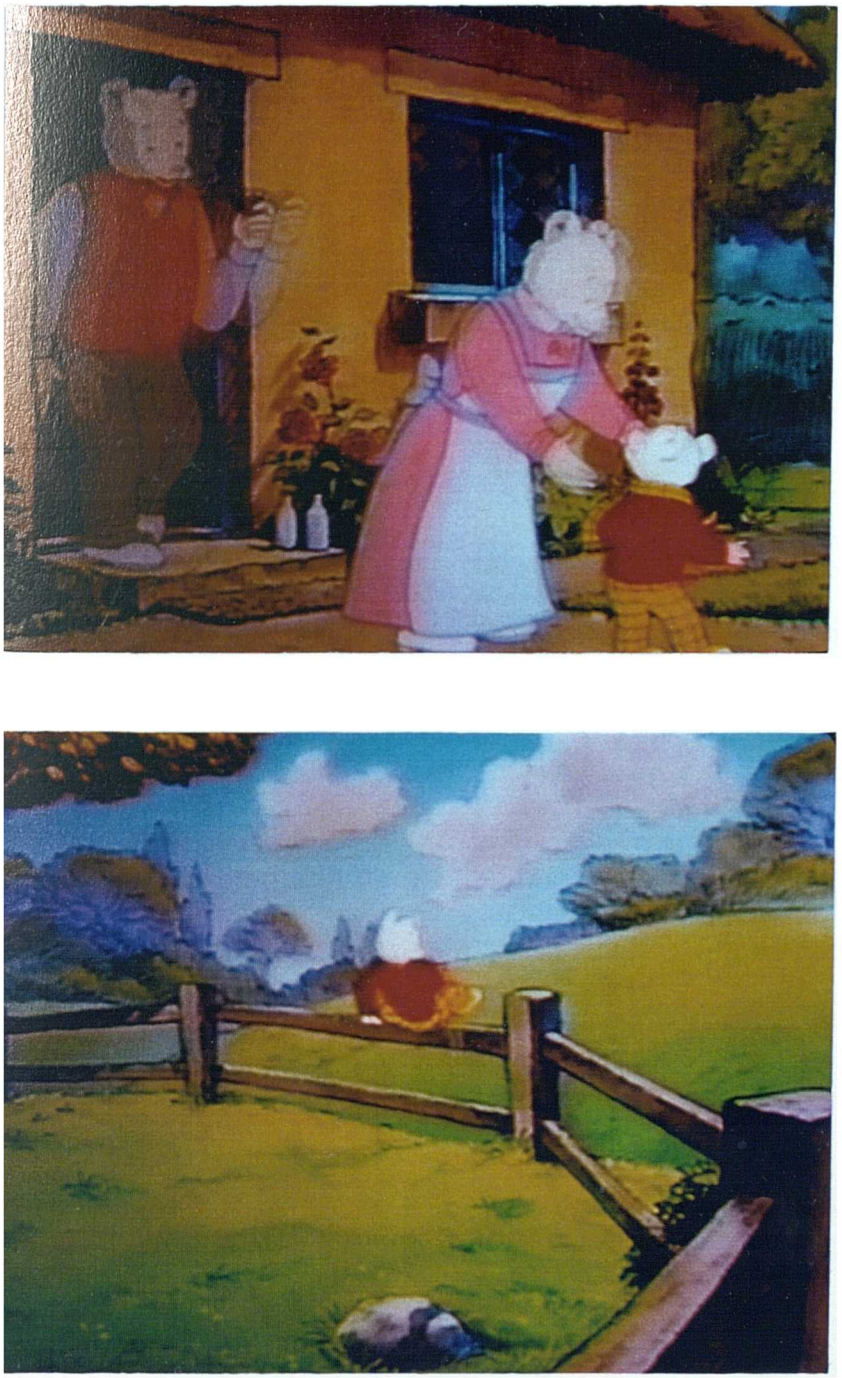


Fig 2.8 Cover of Early Learning Center toy catalogue showing rural scene.

settings, with classics such as the *Wooden Tops* still living in adult recollections of their 'Watch with Mother' days. All these stories in differing ways and differing narratives create countrysides which children are enticed to enter imaginatively. This reflects the construction of a place suitable for children. In the opening sequence of the newly produced *Rupert Bear* stories now available on video, (and sometimes shown on television) Rupert's home is an idyllic thatched country cottage, it is briefly shown from the air as being set in a idyllic country village, then the screen zooms to

ım leaving the door of his house, saying good-bye to his approving patents, and
ı ·n climbing over the garden fence and then into the fields beyond (fig 2.9), and as
r ə does so he turns to the 'camera' and beckons the viewer to come along to share
ı the adventures which will unfold there.



'ig 2.9 Stills from the opening sequence of the 'Rupert' stories showing Rupert saying good-
ye to his parents, climbing over the garden fence, and then running into the countryside
/here the stories unfold. (Rupert series: Tempo Video: 1993, Express Newspapers plc).

2.4 UNPACKING POPULAR DISCOURSES OF COUNTRY CHILDHOODS

My intention now is to try and break down the country childhood idyll into a number of constituting elements. I hope that in doing so I will begin to reveal; what drives such adult discourses; how these can be related to the lived experiences of children in the countryside today, and in the past; how different versions of the childhood countryside idyll may stress different aspects; and finally provide a means of considering changes and threats to the idyll as an idea and as a lived experience. But, drawing upon the old cake analogy for a minute, it cannot be said that one is describing the nature of, or experience of, a cake by simply listing the various ingredients that go to make it up. Clearly the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. But describing the ingredients does give one form of understanding which may be useful. Below I have pulled apart the countryside childhood idyll in an attempt to provide a form of understanding, and it is accepted that the whole is greater than the sum of these parts, and that this kind of division is an 'unnatural' process. The parts I have identified are not sharply defined but much more fuzzy, intermingling and overlapping, and within the accounts below traces of one will be found in another. Also differing accounts of childhood idylls will include differing combinations and emphasis of the 'ingredients' below, and, other elements and other idylls may be omitted. But from my explorations of various versions of the childhood country idyll I have identified the following key elements.

2.4.1 Outdoors

Country childhood discourses are largely considered in terms of outdoor childhoods, or at least of the times spent outdoors[5]. This immediately forms a basic spatial constituent which is of pertinence to geographies concerned with domestic/family scale spaces. The stories and examples deployed here, from autobiographical accounts, children's stories, romantic poetry, all are predominantly about outdoor experiences. The ability of children to go out, unsupervised by their parents or other

[5] There could be a case for considering rural internal domestic spaces also. From the romantic, charming chaos of Laurie Lee's house in *Cider with Rosie,* and the secure, wholesome, traditional, yeoman, again romantic (rambling) Badger's house in *Wind in the Willows,* to the contemporary commodification of such imagery in interior design publication and retail, the possibilities exploring an iconography of a rural idyll domestic space is clearly there.

adults, is a prerequisite for the other ingredients of 'a country childhood', such as exploration, adventure, contact with nature, finding and/or making secret spaces, and associating with other children.

Thompson (1973) recounts how in the village where she grew up being outdoors was the norm from early childhood.

> Every morning they were bundled into a piece of old shawl crossed on the chest and tied in a hard knot at the back, a slice of food was thrust into their hands and they were told to "go play" while their mothers got on with the housework. In winter, their little limbs purple mottled with cold, they would stamp around playing horses or engines, in summer they would make mud pies in the dust, moistening them from their own most intimate water supply.
>
> They were like little foals turned out to grass, and received about as much attention (p.41).

The use of the outdoors here is a matter of domestic organization, but within much of the literature it soon becomes subsumed or entangled with much more romantic perspectives which considered the outdoor environment. The poet Edward Thomas (1938) in his account of his own childhood tells how the last two sentences of Jefferies' *The Amateur Poacher* -

> Let us get out of these indoor modern days, whose twelve hours somehow have become shortened, into the sunlight and the pure wind. A something that the ancients thought divine can be found and felt there still (p.134).

- became for him 'a gospel, an incantation' (ibid p.134).

This is redolent of the whole Romantic and Transcendental philosophical traditions which were concerned with the recoupling of humanity with nature, links which were seen as broken by the rationalities of the enlightenment and the development of urban industrial societies. This almost inevitably meant a favoring of the outdoors and 'natural' environments as a means of contact with nature against the artificiality of the interior and urban world.

The influence of Romanticism is picked up again in the next two sections, 'Innocence' and 'Nature', and it is futile to try and separate out any further the experience of being outdoors from the experiences which being outdoors brings. Though it should be added that as well as being a primary condition of ideas of country childhoods, the outdoors seems to be associated with childhood in general. Titman (1994), drawing on the work of Chawla (1886) who explored adult memory of childhood interaction with place, points out that 'some of their strongest memories

and recollections of childhood relate to places, often 'outdoor places' (p.6), and these 'outdoor places were remembered out of all proportion to the relative number of hours spent there' (p. 7).

A final point to be made, which primes more detailed discussions later, is that if the opportunity of children to be outside is restricted or eliminated, or cultural changes to childhood turn children indoors, the whole notion of 'a country childhood', and other outdoor childhood experiences, is seriously undermined and many of its subsequent aspects, such as contact with nature, secret spaces, open air adventure, are eliminated as possibilities.

2.4.2 Innocence

Childhood is often seen by adults as a state of innocence, (the implications of this are explored more fully in Chapter 3 and later chapters). The same can be said of nature and the countryside as nature. Brought together in the notion of rural childhood they confirm and enhance their reputations of innocence. This again is heavily shaded by the legacies of the Romantic and Transcendental traditions. Positive associations between childhood and rural/pastoral settings formed the subject matter of some of the earliest and most notable expressions of Romantic poetry and thought. Blake's *Songs of Innocence* is a series of poems which synthesizes childhood and nature/rural into visions of innocence,

> And I plucked a hollow reed,
> And I made a rural pen,
> And I stained the water clear,
> And I wrote my happy songs
> Every child may joy to hear.
>
> (From 'Introduction, Songs of Innocence', Blake 1990)

These poems were later contrasted by Blake in the series 'Songs of Experience', where, in the poem 'London' he portrays his vision of the city and the child in the city.

> I wandered thro' each charter'd street,
> Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
> And mark in every face I meet
> Marks of weakness, marks of woe.
>
> In every cry of every Man,
> In every Infant's cry of fear,
> In every voice, in every ban,
> The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

> How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
> Every black'ning Church appalls;...
>
> (ibid, p.38)

The notion of the countryside being an innocent space in which the innocence of children can remain untainted is held in a complex relationship with ideas of the urban being potentially a corrupting or corrupted space, and this is a theme which will periodically surface throughout the remainder of this work.

Although Blake expressed 'scorn' for Rousseau (Willmott, 1990) it was the latter whose ideas were critical in the development of Romanticism and modern constructions of childhood. His vision of enlightenment knowledge and culture corrupting the 'natural man', destroying the state of primitive innocence, was given practical expression in *Emile* (1762, 1955) in which the natural innocent character of 'man' that Rousseau saw in the child was to be protected and developed - by a new approach to education - rather than corrupted and suppressed. According to Drabble and Stringer (1987), '*Emile* ... lays down the principles for a new scheme of education in which the child is to be allowed full scope for individual development in natural surroundings, shielded from the harmful influences of civilization' (p. 851). These stories 'of the upbringing of an individual boy by his tutor in rural seclusion' had far reaching influences on the literary portrayal of the child in England (ibid), and on educational theories (Brown 1993, p. 4), and on our collective cultural constructions of what childhood is. 'This great philosophical shift' from seeing the child as a 'creature of innate evil' (after Calvin) to 'the child...allied with the natural world, and childhood, a period of improbably extreme innocence'[6] (after Locke and Rousseau) can be traced in visual representations of children contained within art of that period. 'Artists increasingly depicted children outdoors, often close to animals and the larger natural world' (ibid). Just how complete such constructions of childhood became is captured by Lynd (1942) who concludes her book *English Childhood* quoting an anonymous contemporary essayist writing on children -

> 'How exquisite are their voices, that all are music without the harshness of experience! To listen to them is like listening to the first birds. To see them is to be in a world of apple trees in flower,... In short .. (Lynd adds) .. angels (p. 47).

---

[6] These quotes are taken from the literature which accompanied the exhibition - 'The New Child: British Art and the Origins of Modern Childhood 1730-1830' University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive/University of California at Berkeley, (Regents of the University of California, 1995).

The countryside, with the proximity of some forms of 'nature', remains the environment in which it is seen that the innocence of childhood is at home, and can best resist the pressures it inevitably comes under from a variety of sources. As various conceptions of childhood being in crisis emerge (these are detailed later), a whole series of media features have centered around the narratives of parents moving to the countryside in order to protect or restore their children's childhood. For example, Lauren Young (She Magazine, AUG 1995) when recounting her family's move from London to rural Dorset, put consideration of the benefits for her two children (aged three and nine), at the heart of her narrative. She concluded, (two years after the move), - 'there's an innocence and sweetness about country children that our eldest had almost lost' (now), he's quite transformed' (fig 2.10).

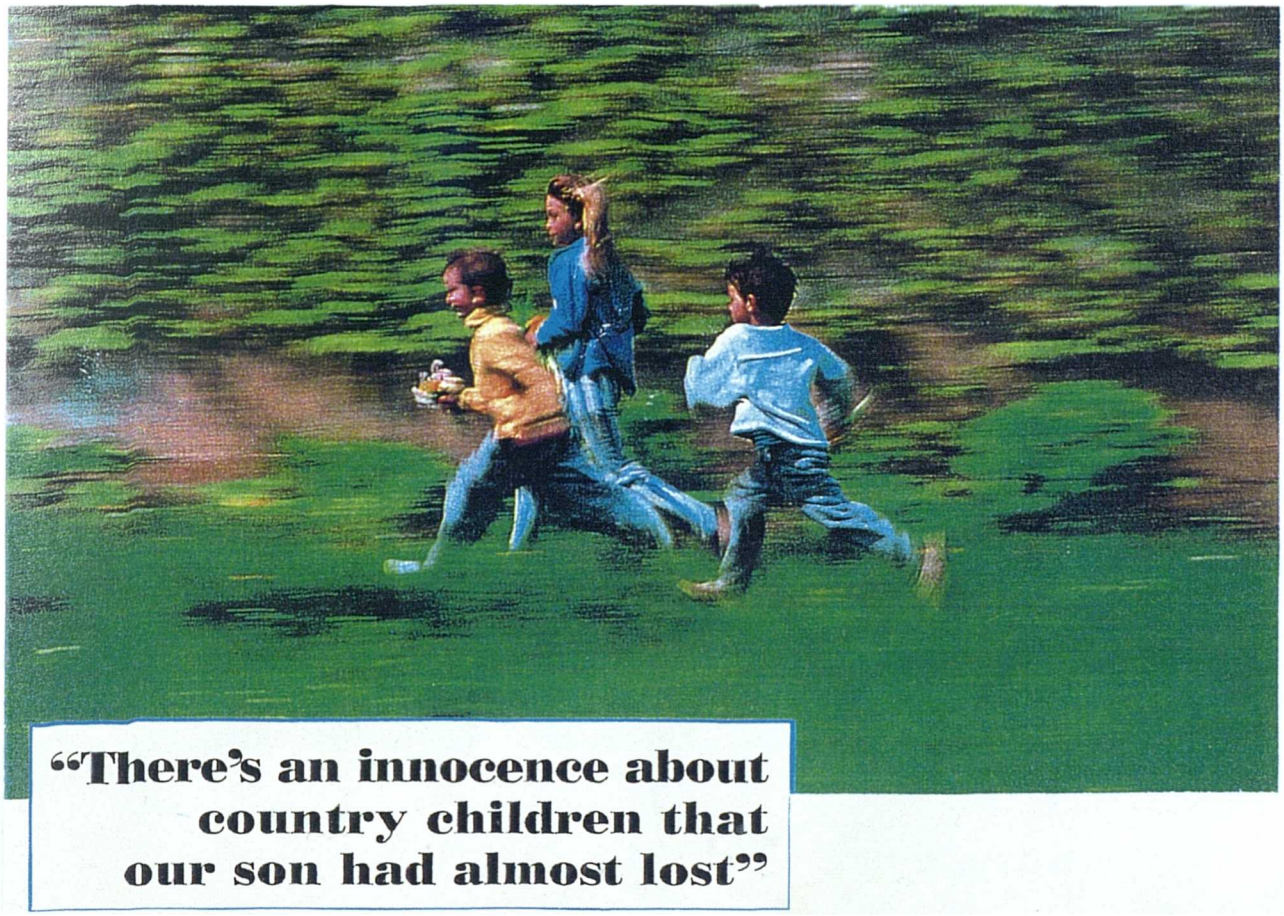


Fig 2.10 'There's an innocence about country children'... This image is one of freedom, health, nature, children together. (She Magazine, AUG 1995).

This idea that the countryside is the best environment for children to be children, to be innocent, is at the heart of these constructions of country childhood idylls. In a remarkably similar article to that above, another mother recounted in You Magazine (Mail on Sunday, SEP 1996) that she and her partner were not happy with their six year old daughter's childhood in London, and that they decided

> that what we wanted for our children was a proper childhood.... so we moved to a small village in Cornwall...Within a few months, Jessica, now six, had turned from the 'nervous' child she had been in London into a happy, carefree girl. Both she and her sister, Louella, three, have a confidence and an innocence that is often missing in children raised in an urban environment (ibid).

(The issues raised here of the countryside being in some ways a place of for children is covered later in this chapter, and comparative constructions between the rural and the urban as childhood environments is addressed in Chapter 4). As will be shown children running wild in urban environments are often seen as a danger, as feral children, 'little devils', but the wildness of country children is not feared, but cherished and longed for, because it is seen as innocent wildness.

Another element of the innocence that pervades country childhood discourses comes from the notion of children living in a state of becoming, in a state of naiveté in the face of their own mortality. Again this could be said to be a characteristic of adult perceptions of childhood in general, but it is the countryside which is seen as the harmonious environment which is the least likely to disrupt this happy state - the time 'before I knew I was happy' as Dylan Thomas called it (1965, p.52). Retrieving this state is one of the key themes of Thomas' two poems *Fern Hill* and *Poem in October* which are considered amongst his highest achievements (Tremleth, 1991). *Fern Hill* - (which was the 13th most popular poem in the BBC's poll of the 'Nation's Favourite Poems', which was recently published (Jones, 1996) - is a quite overwhelming evocation of a country childhood which could have been included in a number of the headings I have chosen to break it down into. Perhaps, in the way these are synthesized into such a rich vision, it is a testament to the inseparability of such elements, but as one of its most prominent recurring themes is the longed for state of innocence in the face of time, which Thomas felt was his when he was a child, I reproduce it here.

> Fern Hill
>
> Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
> About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
> The night above the dingle starry,
> Time let me hail and climb

Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns
And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
Trail with daisies and barley
Down the rivers of windfall light.

And I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home
In the sum that is young once only,
Time let me play and be
Golden in the mercy of his means,
And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,
And the sabbath rang slowly
In the pebbles of the holy streams.

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air
And playing lovely and watery
And fire green as grass.
And nightly under the simple stars
As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,
All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars
Flying with the ricks, and the horses
Flashing into the dark.

And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white
With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder; it was all
Shining, it was Adam and maiden,
The sky gathered again
And the sun grew round that very day.
So it must have been after the birth of the simple light
In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm
Out of the whinnying green stable
On to the fields of praise.

And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house
Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,
In the sun born over and over,
I ran my heedless ways,
My wishes raced through the house high hay
And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows
In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs
Before the children green and golden
Follow him out of grace.

Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me
Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,
In the moon that is always rising,
Nor the riding to sleep
I should hear him fly with the high fields
And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.
Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

(Thomas, 1952, pp. 159 - 161).

Here the narrative is set outdoors, amongst scenes of nature (foxes, owls), and agriculture (orchard, barn, yard, hay fields). It is run through with the synthesis of innocence, childhood and country space(s). ('lamb white days', 'children green and golden'). It also talks of the unrestricted freedom ('I ran my heedless ways') which is

a critical component of notions of country childhood idylls, and talks of the subversion of space through the child's dreams and adventures.

Whereas Thomas is constructing an account of an adult recollection of his relationship with time (and country space) as a child, some children's literature tries to recreate this relationship within their narrative and represent it from the child's point of view. Lurie (1990) feels that the achievement of this difficult objective is one of the strengths of the work of Mayne whom she, and others (Carpenter and Prichard, 1984) see as one of the most prominent writers of contemporary children's fiction. She see his work as having 'the child's or the primitive's relation to time: it is not regulated by clock and calendar, but is free to contract according to subjective perception' (p. 203). It is noticeable that much of Mayne's work (see Carpenter and Prichard, 1984 for review) has remote country or rural village settings, so again it is these which are seen as appropriate settings for not only spatial but also temporal 'innocence' and freedom.

2.4.3 Nature

I have already shown in the references from Shoard, and in the settings and subject matter of some children's literature, that nature is seen as a key part of the country childhood idyll, and how this is closely tied in with ideas of innocence and the Romantic tradition. This is borne out by many of the autobiographical evocations of country childhoods referred to here which are run through with references to the nature that children encountered in their everyday lives. For example Thompson (1973) tells how

> The white tails of rabbits bobbed in and out of the hedge rows; stoats crossed the road in front of the children's feet . . . there were squirrels in the oak trees, and once they even saw a fox curled up asleep in the ditch beneath thick overhanging ivy. Bands of little blue butterflies flitted here and there or poised themselves with quivering wings on the long bent grass: bees hummed in the white clover blooms (p.35).

And she also recalls the start of a walk to the next village.

> By the roadside all the coarse yellow flowers of late summer were out; goat's beard and lady's finger, tall thickets of ragwort and all the different hawkbits; the sun shone softly through the mist; altogether it was a golden morning (p.336).

If these accounts can be doubted as the literary embellishment of skillful authors, oral history accounts of country childhoods can be found which tell much the same type of stories. Elizabeth Cornick recalled, (quoted in Humphries, Mack and Perks, 1988) -

> My best memories are of swinging on the low hanging branches of oak trees, and birds nesting for chaffinches' and robins' eggs among the bark of lime trees. We played lovely games over and around corn stooks, hunting out rabbit warrens and watching baby rabbits playing ... We made our whistles from sycamore tree branches, poking a knitting needle through the soft pulp. We whittled out bats and stumps from the trees and the hedges (p. 63).

It can only be guessed to what extent the natural history details, such as the names of flora and fauna, have been grafted on to such accounts in the process of adult memory, but there can be little doubt that the closeness to nature - as spectacle, and as provider of hobbies, interest, play spaces, props, and currencies - within accounts of country childhoods is seen to bring not only joy and entertainment but also, importantly, physical and spiritual health, and these themes will re-emerge at subsequent points.

2.4.4 Agriculture

It must also be stressed that often it was not just 'wild' nature which was seen to bestow such benefits but also nature as mediated through the processes of agriculture; the more pastoral vision of the countryside. Equally it should not be assumed that the appeal and presence of agriculture within these discourses is purely down to its transmission of nature. It is also about different sorts of spaces and surfaces, differing relationships between child and adult worlds, and the whole social/cultural/material patterns agriculture created within the countryside. The fields, hedges, woods, farmyards, farm buildings, the animals, and processes of farming are all deeply present in accounts of country childhoods.

Lee (1962) vividly recounts how on one winters' day he and other children from his village spontaneously decide to visit one of the local farms, when they had gathered and considered what to do -

> 'Let's go an 'elp Farmer Wells,' ...
> So we went to the farm on the lip of the village ...
> 'Wan' any 'elp, Mr. Wells?' we asked ...
> 'Well, come on,' he said. 'But no playing the goat...'
>
> Inside the cowsheds it was warm and voluptuous, smelling sweetly of milky breath, of heaving hides, green dung, and udders, of steam and fermentations. We carried cut hay from the heart of the rick, packed tight as tobacco flake, with grass and wild flowers juicily fossilized within - a whole summer embalmed in our arms.
>
> I took a bucket of milk to feed a calf. I opened its mouth like a hot wet orchid. It began to suck at my fingers, gurgling in its throat and raising its long-lashed eyes (p.139).

Many other accounts of country childhood such as Davies (1989) and Read (1933) have similarly detailed accounts of childhood interaction with agricultural spaces and processes, and as I have already considered, such discourses also have profuse manifestations within children's books, and toy products. These not only make the processes, spaces, animals and technology of (mostly 'traditional') agriculture the subject matter of their content, but often portray children within these idyllic rural settings to both the child and adult consumers of these texts (fig. 2.11).

Contemporary discourses of children and agriculture remain rich and varied, ranging from the spiritual to the commercial. In the wonderful *What is the Truth?* - a 'farmyard fable for the young' - written by Ted Hughes and illustrated by R J Lloyd (1984), nature/agriculture is presented as a spiritual medium through which God articulates his presence on earth.

> 'And the Truth is' God went on, 'that I was that Fox. Just as I was that Foal. As I am, I am. I am that Foal. And I am the Cow. I am the Weasel and the Mouse. The Wood Pigeon and the Partridge. The Goat, the Badger, the Hedgehog, the Hare. Yes, and the Hedgehog's flea. I am each of these things. The Rat, the Fly, and each of these things is Me. It is, It is. That is the Truth' (p. 121).

The charm of farms and farmyards for children has, in some instances, now been commodified as farmers try to diversify out of the agricultural crisis in the UK. A Travel feature on such ventures (Observer, 14 MAR 1993), featured Treffery Farm, Bodmin, Cornwall, reporting, 'children will enjoy this 200-acre dairy farm where hens and ducks wander freely. They can watch the milking, help feed the calves, collect the eggs and ride Fred the docile pony'. The article also included an illustrating picture of a young girl feeding a lamb from a bottle accompanied with the illustration 'the countryside is full of free attractions'.

The idea that such encounters are both happy and healthy for children is captured by Munro's (1978) assessment of rural children.

> The rural child as an individual, secure and important in his own right ... is closer to the natural world - of growing things, seedtime and harvest, decay and renewal. Because of this he is quieter and usually more serene - somehow slower yet often more assured. He is aware of belonging to something real, and what he sees in the countryside reassures him to this knowledge (preface).

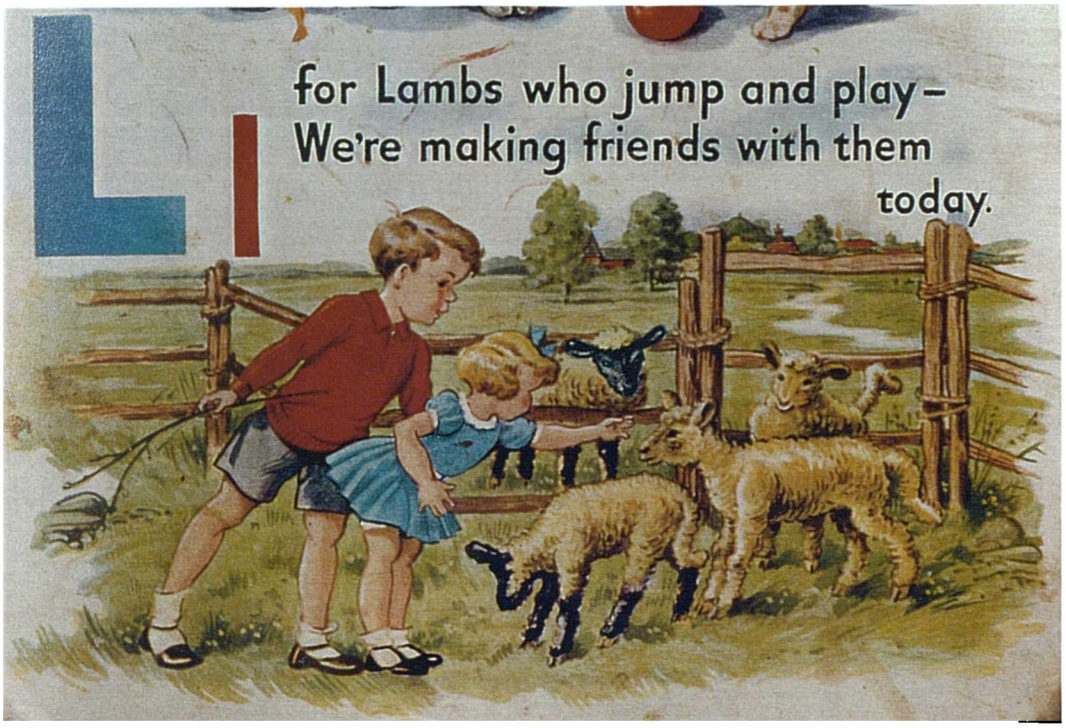


Fig. 2.11 Children's book portraying children in country idyll. Illustrations from; *My Farm ABC*, A Look with Mother Book, Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd. Undated.

Before going on to consider the idea of country childhoods being both healthy and healing, I again end on a note of concern which is explored in detail later. There is little doubt that British agriculture has gone through a number of radical changes, both in its practices, internal structures and its relationship with the countryside and rurality. Examples of the possible consequences of just some of these for country childhoods have already been shown in the extracts from Shoard. Nearly all the accounts of country childhoods used here are set within agricultural landscapes, processes and structures which have long since gone through radical change.

Even the most recent accounts, as they are being written by adults remembering childhoods, are recalling scenarios of at least twenty years ago, and in fact, most accounts are from earlier in this century or even from the 19th century, so there is an inevitable lag between the images of childhood which emerge and are sustained by such accounts and the reality of children's lives in contemporary agricultural landscapes.

In Herbert Read's (1933) account of his country childhood, *The Innocent Eye*, the day to day lives, games and adventures he and his siblings enjoyed are described in great detail, and it is apparent that many of these were embedded within the fabric of the agricultural practices and spaces of the farm itself. For example they 'sometimes ran between the shafts of the (horse-drawn) plough, pretending to guide it to a truer furrow' (p.44), or in the winter, they sought the warmth of the loft where the saddles were kept. Here they 'could play undisturbed' making lead shot over the stove which was kept alight all winter.

Some of my own earlier memories of my country childhood are also set within technological systems now themselves defunct. I have vivid recollections of the sacker combines on which the grain was fed into sacks which had to be tied shut when full, and discharged from the machine as it proceeding on through the crop. The sacking platform was a place where children could stand and watch, or help by cutting the lengths of string which were used for tying the sacks and hooking empty sacks onto the waiting hopper chutes. The full sacks were pushed down a slide, and when it was full with about five sacks, they were released to slide onto the stubble as the combine continued on. It was a great excitement to sit on one of the sacks and to be slowly jettisoned. Then games ensued, chasing across the sacks

lying in broken lines around the fields trying to touch the ground as little as possible. The sacks were then picked up by tractor and trailer and loaded into the barn where they became a sweet, musty, dark, silent labyrinth to explore. The advent of bulk grain handling has obliterated these previous technologies and the opportunities children had to interact with them. No doubt the new technologies bring new opportunities, but the overall shift to automation, more complex technologies, and larger scales of operation may have lessened the possible unofficial use of agricultural forms for children's play. But despite these changes the link between children and farming and particularly harvest time continues to be made. Fig 2.12 shows the cover photograph of *The Countryside Remembered'* by Ward (1991), and fig 2.13 shows the cover of Farmers Weekly (10 SEP 1993) which is entitled 'the harvest through a child's eyes' and illustrated with the winning entry from a competition in which children had to paint a harvest scene. Perhaps it is indicative of the position of the child in the country, or at least in the context of modern agriculture, that within these two pictures children have gone from being in the picture, to a position of being outside looking in on a landscape of high technologies, devoid of children, or any people other than those driving the machines.

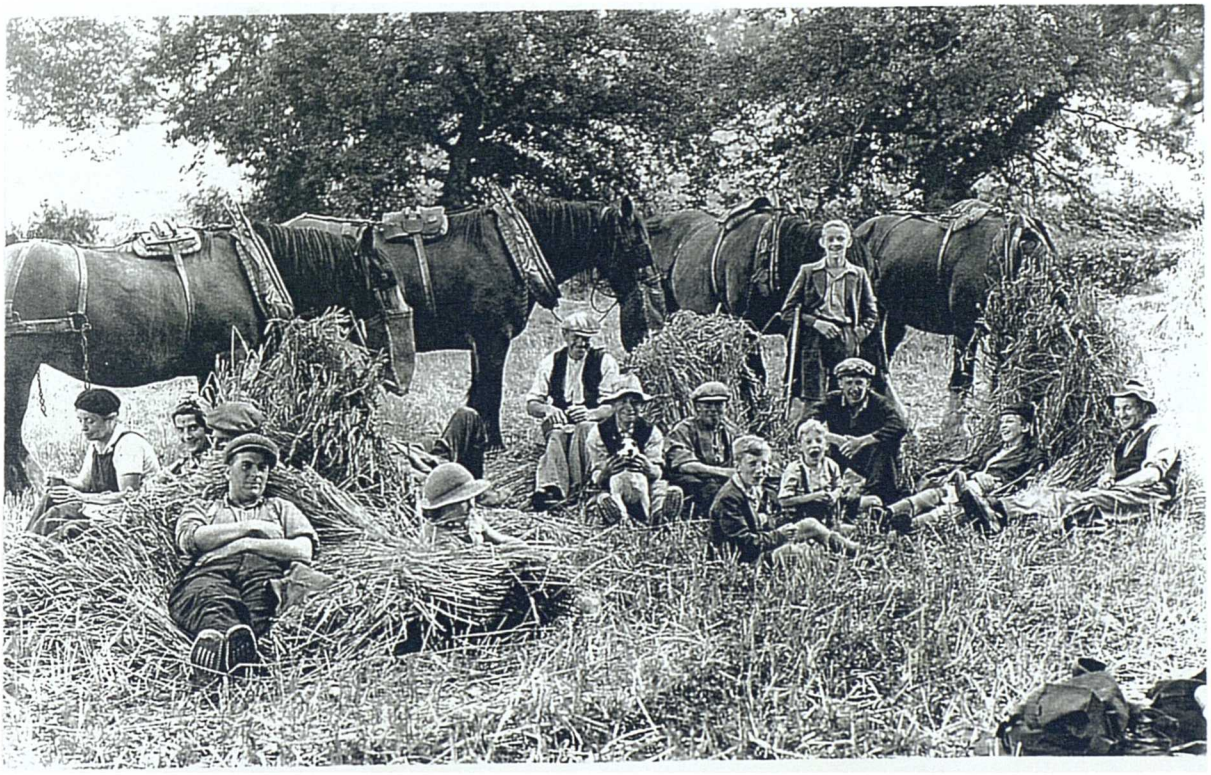


Fig 2.12 Cover illustration of Ward's (1991) *The Countryside Remembered*, showing children as part of the harvest scene.

Fig 2.13 Cover of Farmer's Weekly (10 SEP 1993) 'The harvest through a child's eyes'.

2.4.5 Healthy and Healing

Perceptions of the rural being a 'happy and healthy' environment for children spans from ideas of spiritual/psychological well being to more straight forward notions of fresh air and exercise. The idea of the countryside providing an overall package of physical and spiritual good for children, can be extrapolated from the reputation these places have as sites of healing for children when they were transferred to such settings from what were and are seen as less favorable environments.

In *The Secret Garden* by Burnett (1993), 'one of the great icons of children's literature' (Gunther, 1994, p. 159), the central character, Mary, arrived as a 'yellow-faced, sickly, bored and wretched child' but

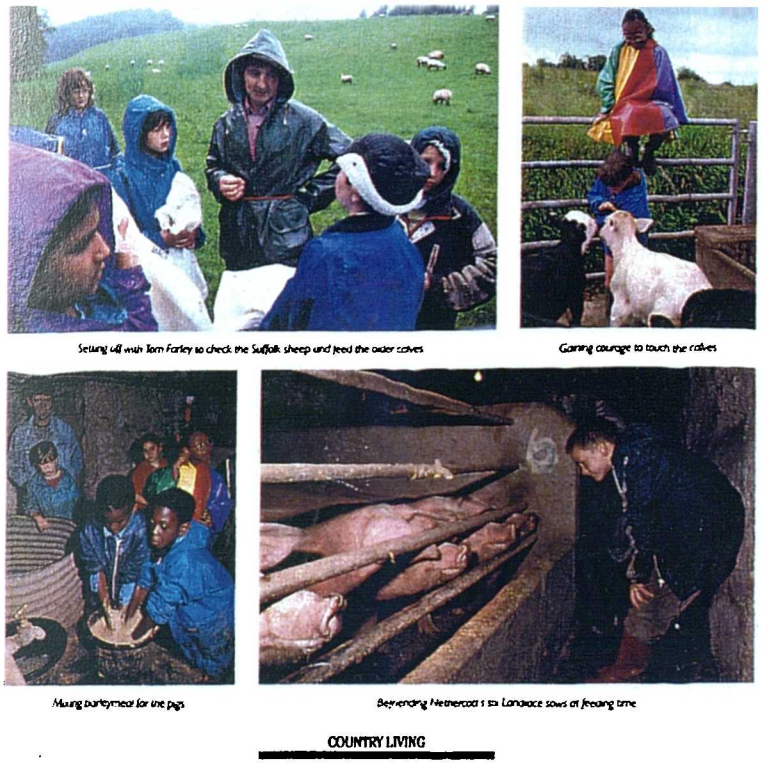
> when her mind gradually filled itself with robins, and moorland cottages crowded with children, with queer crabbed old gardeners, ... with springtime and with secret gardens coming alive day by day, and also with a moor boy and his "creatures", there was no room left for the disagreeable thoughts which affected her liver and her digestion and made her yellow and tired (p.284).

Both Mary, and her companion Colin, who was a 'hysterical, half-crazy little hypochondriac who knew nothing of the sunshine and the spring' (p.284) were regenerated, made wholesome and healthy by the contact with nature, and those close to nature, they encountered in the secret garden and the surrounding countryside.

Based on such notions there is a history of groups who have dedicated themselves to bringing (disadvantaged) urban children and the countryside together, usually by taking the children to the countryside; and interrupting this history was the mass evacuation of children from urban centers to the countryside in the second World War. Lynd (1942) states that in the last decade of the nineteenth century 'the importance of fresh air (for children) was discovered...and the Fresh Air Fund and the Children's Country Holiday Fund began to take slum children into the country' (p. 45).

In the evacuation of children from London and other cities in the Second World War to rural areas considered safe from bombing, there was immediate popular concern at the revelations of the condition of the city children these produced, and also an expectation and hope within the Board of Education and the teachers running the scheme, that their health would improve. Macnicol (1986) quotes from an early report on the scheme given in the House of Commons - 'The children who have gone to the country are much taller, stronger and better fed, they sleep longer and in every way they are alert and more easy to teach' (p.19). Macnicol points out that although there was a vested interest in such a message, namely making evacuation more acceptable and preventing 'drift-back to the danger areas', *'it seemed tantalizingly obvious that country life was healthier'* and that 'everyone expected' the urban children to benefit. (As it turned out these expectations were largely unfulfilled).

Today such discourses are still evident in a number of institutionalized forms. The mission of the charity 'Farms for City Children' is to take groups of children, 'from the classrooms of the bleakest inner-city streets' and 'set them down in the classic agricultural landscape of south-west England'. (Country Living, OCT 1993, p.87). In the article it is stressed that the children are not fed the rural idyll story line but are given a realistic view of agriculture and the rural world (fig 2.14), but the whole underpinning ethos is that children denied such contact are in some way deprived both spiritually and educationally.



Setting off with Tom Farley to check the Suffolk sheep and feed the older calves

Gaining courage to touch the calves

Mixing buttermeal for the pigs

Bejewelling Nethercott's Tin Lizzie sows at feeding time

COUNTRY LIVING

CLASSROOM TO COWSHED

FARMS FOR CITY CHILDREN, OUR CHARITY FOR 1993, PLANTS PUPILS FROM INNER-CITY SCHOOLS IN THE HEART OF THE COUNTRYSIDE AND TURNS THEM INTO FARMERS FOR A WEEK. ELISABETH DUNN WATCHED AS NETHERCOTT IN NORTH DEVON WORKED ITS MAGIC ON A GROUP OF LIVELY LONDONERS

Fig 2.14 Farms for City Children. Country Living magazine's charity for 1993. (Country Living (OCT 1993) - The reporter 'watched as Nerthcott in North Devon *worked its magic* on a group of lively Londoners' (emphasis added).

As well as the countryside being a site of educational trips for children of junior school age, it is also seen as a site of spiritual calming and self-discovery for teenagers. Joanna Hughes (Western Daily Press, 7 AUG 1995) reported on a venture holiday business which provides, 'camping as self discovery - a cross

between Enid Blyton's Famous Five and Saint Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus'. This culminates in a '24- hour period of complete solitude in the woods' during which 'the youngsters are encouraged to ask themselves, "Who am I? What do I want from life? What direction is best for me" '.

Conversely the City Farm movement has endeavoured to bring some form of 'agriculture', nature and the countryside into the inner city. According to their literature many City Farms are 'sited in some of the most neglected parts of our towns and cities' (National Federation of City Farms, current (1996) leaflet, undated), where,

> inner city children are able to learn first hand how to look after animals and plants, how farming produces food for the table. For many who never see 'real' countryside, this is there only opportunity for contact with non-domestic animals like cows, sheep and goats (ibid).

Although City Farms have a range of quite complex agendas ranging from environmental awareness to renewing inner city communities, which are not aimed exclusively at children, putting children in contact with agri-nature is one of their most prominent themes, and this is reflected in the images that illustrate their publicity material (fig 2.15).

These various elements of discourses which draw positive associations between children, the outdoors, nature and agriculture, are clearly indicative of the great breadth and depth of constructions of country childhood idylls which pervade our understanding of childhood and the countryside. As Jonathan Miller put it (Sunday Times 27, APR 1997),

> A new generation is fleeing the city in quest of rural bliss and most of those streaming from the London will tell you they are doing it for the children. As part of our national mythology, we hold the country to be a good thing for children and other living things...

2.4.6 Pairs, Gangs and Cohorts

Beyond the themes set out above there are a number of other 'key ingredients' within constructions of country childhood idylls. Significant within these is the notion of children being and playing together. The great majority of the accounts considered here involve children in some form of group. Only *Fern Hill* seems predominately solitary, the rest by contrast are populated by numbers of children. For example in autobiographical accounts such *Cider with Rosie* and *Lark Rise to Candleford* the cast of the story is the population of the village and particularly the

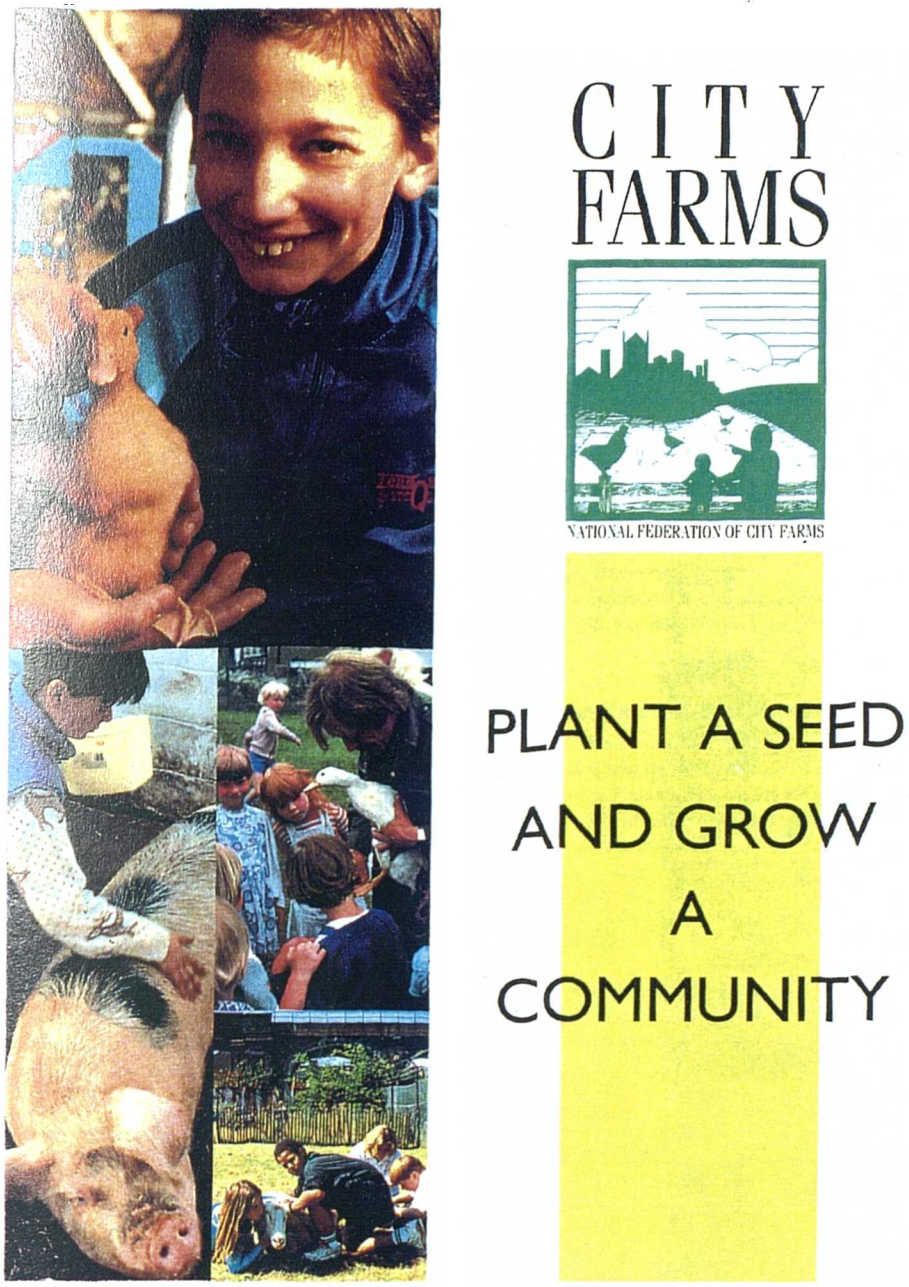


Fig 2.15 City Farms publicity material showing children with animals.

cohort of village children who played and grew up together. Most children's adventure stories are based around gangs or groups, such as the *Famous Five*, *William* and the Outlaws, *Swallows and Amazons, and The Railway Children,* or in some cases pairs, notably *Bevis* who shares all his adventures with Mark, a boy of similar age, and also Dahl's *Danny the Champion of the World*. Similarly, books which portray other forms of fantasy country idyll also revolve around companionship such as *Winnie the Pooh* and his friends, and Ratty and Mole and their friends in *The Wind in the Willows.* The appeal and resonance of all these stories could not be sustained without the presence of companionship.

This idea of companionship within the country childhood idyll, as do so many of the other elements discussed, reflects more general notions of childhood idyll, and Robert's (1980) points out that Rousseau's 'fictional child *Emile* signally lacked the most important element of play - other children' (p. 41). The implications here are obvious if Ward's (1990) observation, reiterated by Philo (1992), that there are fewer rural children due to the changing social/demographic profiles of rural populations. Those children that remain or move to rural areas may not find peer groups with which to play, thus they may become isolated and this is a real concern for those addressing rural child welfare issues. The idyll needs to be shared by children, otherwise much of its potency is lost. This line of argument could be extended to suggest that the countryside becomes an idyll if it provides circumstances in which children can associate freely in space which is constructed as innocent by adults who are thus happy to sanction degrees of freedom.

2.4.7 Adventure

With a combination of some of the above elements - spaces to explore, and gangs of children away from adult supervision - the scene is set for adventure. To a degree the whole idea of a country childhood can be seen in terms of adventure, as encounters with nature and uses of differing spaces show. But there are discourses in which adventure becomes more than just these, and they are best expressed represented by the many examples of children's adventure stories which are set in countryside locations. Such adventures are stories which involve exploration, mystery, suspense, nature, conflict between two or more elements, and a strong narrative line. They range in nature from being 'real life', where the story is told as an account of 'real' events, to being a frame work of 'real events' which are reinterpreted or embellished into complex fantasy stories.

Perhaps all play is to an extent an adventure, but as indicated earlier in 'Stories for Childhood' the countryside becomes the place of adventure in childhood literature. The very titles of Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* adventure stories reveal their dependence on access to countryside. *Five: - On Finniston Farm - Go To Smuggler's Top - Go Off in A Caravan - On Kirren Island Again - Go off to Camp - Go to Mystery Moor - Go to Billycock Hill - Go to Demon's Rocks.*

Other equally famous adventure stories are again set in 'real' landscapes and 'real' events such as Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* but onto these physical adventures of rival groups of children sailing and camping are overlain imaginative re-interpretations where the children (or the author on their behalf), re-fictionalise their adventures into other narratives of pirates and treasure. This is a particularly strong feature of Richard Jefferies' (1882) *Bevis,* where the adventures within a small area of wood and scrub-land and on the stream running through it, become within the children's minds truly global as they explore - 'The Mississippi', 'By the New Nile', 'Central Africa' , 'The Jungle', and encounter 'Savages'. Yet others still combine physical and imaginative adventure with supernatural, magical and historical elements, notable examples of these being Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* and John Masefield's *The Box of Delights*, and more recently the work of Alan Garner has continued these traditions with works such as *The Owl Service.* Critically it is the countryside which is chosen as the settings for all these works, for it provides not only the fictional physical space for adventure, but also the imaginative even mystical space in which such narratives can unfold unimpinged by the jarring nature of much of everyday life. This is a powerful source of 'viewing the countryside' for the children and adults who read such texts and view the many television adaptations of such and other works.

2.4.8 Freedom, Safety, Family, Community

Inevitably, these divisions above could have been cut differently, and other headings jostle to be included, but they are the ones which I see as being the most prominent in the context of this work. But there are other element worthy of attention, particularly freedom, safety, family and community. The relegation of these to a final category is likely to be a result of the stratas of my positionality, particularly gender breaking to the surface of the work, but I see these as more unspoken fabric or backgrounds to such narratives rather than their main content. Others could no doubt redraw a portrayal of country childhood with these at the fore, and indeed some of the texts I draw upon , notably *Cider with Rosie* is a lot about family, - Lee's mother and sisters - and the village community.

But to address freedom and safety first. Freedom is perhaps the key enabling characteristics of these accounts of country childhoods. The children are free from excessive spatial and temporal restrictions, and can therefore build their own

geographies and in doing so exploit the resources and the spaces the countryside is seen to offer. This later emerges as the pivot to much concern about childhood and the constructions of childhood in the case study village. All these stories about children outdoors playing and wandering together freely is underpinned by adult constructions of the safety of the child in the country. These constructions include children being safe from crimes of personal violence; safe from contact with corrupting influence, including 'getting into (serious) trouble', and relatively safe from the risk of serious accidents. Although within the latter there is a crucial issue of the safety of children on farms which provides a grim statistical counter-point to idyll discourses. In chapters 3 and 4 I return to this idea of safety and how it's erosion by growing discourses of fear are impacting on the structures and constructions of childhood in general, and how these may be spatially differentiated between 'rural', 'urban' and other types of environment.

I now want to briefly want to consider community and family which in some respects is linked to ideas of safety, in that many of the accounts of childhood idylls are set in small often 'closed' 'knowable communities'. Again these are to some extent latent discourses, in that they are often not overtly highlighted within the various accounts, but rather form part of the underlying fabric against which the stories unfold. Clearly ideas of the rural idyll in general have a strong content of 'the village community', and of 'traditional family' and the child's place within these being a key element. Much 'rural writing' is based on portrayals of the intricacies and intimacies of village life, and there is a legacy of women writers, stretching from Mrs. Gaskell's *Cranford* through Mary Russell Mitford's *Our Village*, the Miss Read *Thrush Green* novels, to more recent work such as Joanna Trollope's *The Rector's Wife*, who have been prominent in these areas. But although children are visible within these stories they are not written specifically from, supposedly, the child's perspective. Claire Messud (Guardian, 15 SEP 1993) quotes Allison Light's observation that Women's rural writing may have a 'a different emotional and physical geography' to that of men in that 'more attention' is paid to 'the family and maintaining the stability of village life'. Such family and community elements often form the background rather than the foreground of many accounts of country childhoods. Just as agricultural change has implications for contemporary (lived) versions of these sorts of stories, the many changes in community structure and family structures will also have impact on such stories, and again general concern over the positions of

children within such structures may also be impacting on the experiences and adult constructions of country childhoods.

2.5 PORTRAITS OF COUNTRY CHILDHOOD SPACES

I now want to consider these accounts in terms of the spaces they are set in. This is necessary in order to consider the geographies of country childhoods in the terms set out in recent conceptualizations of the issues of children's geographies. Both James (1990, 1991) and Sibley (1991, 1995) are concerned with how children live in spaces which are materially and symbolically ordered on adult terms and scales. They advocate that geography should be sensitive to both the structuring this imposes and the resistance and subversion it meets, and Philo's (1992) call for a developing sensitivity towards rural otherness clearly entails such spatial implications. Furthermore, as will be shown, much concern over rural childhood has spatial dimensions to it in terms of either the loss of the spaces of childhood, or the increased restriction of access to such spaces, so again spatializing these accounts of country childhood idylls will provide links to such concerns. Finally the spatiality which does emerge so strongly in idyll accounts may hold some clues as to the constructed nature of the accounts and the extent to which they are/were in touch with children's lived experience of the rural or otherwise reflect processes of adult idealization and imagination. Also, as I will suggest, some sensitivity to the otherness of children's geographies may be identifiable through paying attention to the types of spaces portrayed.

2.5.1 Separate and Secret Spaces

The countryside would not be seen such a medium of childhood idyll if it was a homogeneously adult ordered and used space or series of spaces The existence of and access to a variety of differing spaces is a critical part of the country childhood idyll. Such spaces can be seen as resulting from either spatial, temporal, or imaginative separation, and is often a intricate blend of all three.

In *Bevis* by Jefferies (1882), almost all the action of this three volume account of boyhood adventures, is set in a small terrain which is described in the opening pages.

> The brook made a sharp turn round the withy-bed, enclosing a tongue of ground which was called in the house at home the peninsula, because of its shape and being surrounded on

> three sides by water. This piece of land, which was not all withy, but partly open and partly copse, was Bevis's own territory, his own peculiar property, over which he was autocrat and king (p.2).

This extract is one of many examples in which separate spaces play critical roles in country childhood idylls. These spaces are separate in so far as they are apart from adult worlds, adult dominated space. In *Bevis* this space is provided by the fact that the patch of land was redundant to adult use and was thus mostly an adult no-go area. Similarly in the *William* stories the Outlaws' 'headquarters', and the pivot to many narratives, was 'the old barn', another space from which adult usage had withdrawn.

Other separate spaces are created by temporal structuring when adult use of a space is intermittent and in the gaps children can move in and take over. There are many examples of these kinds of spaces within accounts of country childhoods, and often these were generated by the seasonal, and even daily cycles of agriculture. Barns, cowsheds, fields often became temporarily redundant spaces where the activities of children would not come into conflict with other uses. Harvest time, which I have already considered as part of the agricultural fabric of country childhood, is a classic example of this, and it does feature in many accounts of country childhood. Fields of standing crops were sternly protected from the trampling feet of playing children, but once they were cut, what remained were fields of stubble onto which children could venture. Davies' (1989) account of a field of oats being cut with a binder - when the children gather on the stubble to see if any foxes and rabbits finally emerge as the ever decreasing area of standing crop was finally cleared - is a story which will ring true to many. The fields of stubble, dotted, in earlier times, with corn stooks, or later with grain sacks and straw bales, or even more recently, dramatically or quietly aflame through straw and stubble burning, or today with the big bales of mechanical handling, make wonderful spaces for children's games. I can remember on our farm games where the bales once tumped up for loading made excellent 'cover' for running battles of stubble bombing war-games, in which a handful of stubble pulled out of the ground, retained a weight of earth bound by the roots and made 'bombs' which held by the stalks and thrown like a stick grenade flew like heavy shuttlecocks. There remains still an idea that such places are ideal temporary playgrounds. In 'Playdays' (BBC 1, 1995) which has been the BBC's daily children's program form younger children, a special edition was broadcast from a farm, where after watching the combine and the baler

working, the puppet characters, and their adult and child companions, retired to an already harvested field where it was 'quite and safe' to play games of chase, hide and seek around the big bales, also to have a picnic.

But such separate spaces should not just be seen in strictly spatial terms alone. Spaces for children were also seen as separate in their interpretation by children. Frequently adults and children are seen as using and seeing the same spaces but these become separated through the differing interpretations put on them, thus creating the parallel worlds of adulthood and childhood, Roberts (1980). These spatial and imaginative separations were often synthesized together. This is captured by Kenneth Grahame (1928) in the prologue to *The Golden Age* in which he contemplates adults - called Olympians - from a child's point of view.

> On the whole, the existence of these Olympians seemed to be entirely void of interests, even as their movements were confined and slow, and their habits stereotyped and senseless. To anything but appearances they were blind. For them the orchard (a place elf-haunted, wonderful!) simply produced so many apples and cherries; or it didn't - when the failures of Nature were not infrequently ascribed to us. They never set foot within fir-wood or hazel-copse, nor dreamt of the marvels hid therein. The mysterious sources, sources as of old Nile, that fed the duck-pond had no magic for them. They were unaware of Indians, nor recked they anything of bisons pirates (with pistols) though the whole place swarmed with such portents. They cared not to explore for robber's caves, for dig for hidden treasure. Perhaps indeed, it was one of their best qualities that they spent the greater part of their time stuffily indoors (p.2).

This (now somewhat dated) extract not only demonstrates how complex the layering of adult constructions of childhood can be - what it actually consists of is an adult construction of how children see adults seeing children - it also shows that some adult versions of the country childhood idyll have seemingly already built into them children's subversion of space, children's 'otherness', by adapting the child's point of view within the narrative, and this adds yet another dimension to adult constructions of country childhood idylls which has to be unravelled.

The final aspects I want to consider are secret space and manipuble space. As stated before, the ability for children to be away from parental and adult control is a key ingredient of these discourses. Clearly the type of separate spaces considered above played a key part in this, and imaginative worlds are often by their nature secret. But these spaces also needed a certain degree of secrecy from adult surveillance and potential surveillance, even if this was in the unintentional form of adults just stumbling into them or being near by. Thus spaces which were felt to be secret, which children had control over, as well as 'de facto possession' over were

often portrayed as important. This type of space was vividly portrayed in Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective* when the lead character Philip Marlowe is seen as a boy, high up in a tree in a forest canopy, (presumably The Forest of Dean), where he becomes the surveillant, watching adults below, and his father who wanders through the woods looking for him and calling his name. In this secret space the child finds not only temporary refuge, but also power and control over himself and others.

Laurie Lee (1962) recounts such feelings when he and his companions used to go and play with a family of five children who 'lived along the lane just past the sheepish in a farm cottage near a bog'. This place, which was mostly free of adult presence

> was a good place to be at any time ... It seemed down here no disasters could happen, that nothing could touch us. This was Sammy's and Sixpence's; the place past the sheep wash, the hide-out unspoiled by authority (pp 151, 152).

Such spaces were not just found spaces but also created spaces in the forms of dens, tree houses etc. Ward (1990, pp 88, 89) argues that such building activities are 'the most universal of all children's pretend games' and they provide vital places of privacy for children. Ward goes on to re-describe a number of accounts of children building dens which appear in various texts, with the extremely detailed account by Jefferies in *Bevis* being 'the most famous of all evocations of childhood manipulation of space' (p. 89)[7]. Even this aspect of (country) childhood has been processed into glossy rural life style terms. Jon Beer, in Country Living (SEP 1994), celebrates the tree house, advocating that they should be 'well hidden and parent-proof' yet also providing 'how to build a tree house' tips.

The opportunity for children to carry out such activities depends on not only there being spaces in which they can carry out such longitudinal play activities, but also space which provides the various resources required. The countryside, with all the variety of spaces from woods to ramshackle farmyards has been seen as an obvious provider of such resources. This last point brings up perhaps a more specialist discourse of country childhoods, but which does manifest itself in some examples of more popular or 'lay' accounts.

---

[7] Ward (1990, pp 89-93) reports on a number of other detailed accounts of den and tree house building from various autobiographical accounts of country childhoods.

2.5.2 Disordered Space: Other Space

Throughout many accounts of country childhoods there are strains of 'anti-order', these should not necessarily be seen as deliberate calls to rebellion but more expressions of the innate contradiction between adult order and the 'disorder' of children. This theme has expression in a number of forms. In spatial terms many of the accounts of country childhoods highlight not only derelict or abandoned spaces but also untidy corners and spaces where the adult control of the space is more conducive for children precisely because the 'normal' adult ordering has not taken place.

Dylan Thomas (1965) in his autobiographical *Portrait of the Artist as A Young Dog* recalls his delight at his uncle's farmyard and how it was the dilapidation itself which made it so attractive to him as a child,

> The pigsties were at the far end of the yard. We walked towards them ... past three hens scrabbling the muddy cobbles and a collie with one eye, sleeping with it open. The ramshackle outhouses had tumbling, rotten roofs, jagged holes in their sides, broken shutters, and peeling whitewash; rusty screws ripped out from the dangling, crooked boards; the lean cat of the night before sat snugly between the splintered jaws of bottles, cleaning its face, on top of the rubbish pile that rose triangular and smelling sweet and strong to the level of the riddled cart-house roof. There was nowhere like that farmyard in all the slapdash county, nowhere so poor and grand and dirty as that square of mud and rubbish and bad wood and falling stone, where a bucketful of old and bedraggled hens scratched and laid small eggs. A duck *quacked out of the trough in one deserted sty. Now a young man and a* curly boy stood staring and sniffing over a wall at a sow, with its tits on the mud, giving suck (p.12).

Here, as in the children's story *Shaker Lane* - which Philo (1997) uses as a text through which to explore ideas of 'other rurals' - the disorder is the product of adults who for some reasons or other do not order or purify the spaces they control in a way which is often associated with adult worlds. In such spaces the otherness of children is not constrained by the 'purification of space'. (These issues emerge as major themes in the second part of this dissertation).

But again it is not simply a matter of differing types of spaces, but also of spaces, or terrains being seen and used differently. And it is often the conflict between these conflicting constructions of spaces that become the actual content of stories. The *William* stories by Crompton - which are have become a national institution - portray a scruffy anarchic eleven year old who, in living life to his own child-like logic leaves a wake of traumatized and confounded adults. These stories contain an underlying

discourse of childhood subversion of adult orderings of the world, as William pronounces to his gang of friends, collectively called *'the outlaws'* - 'civilization is all wrong'.

Some of Roal Dahl's (1974, 1994) stories, also are set in the countryside, and have themes of rural spaces being the sites of conflict and subversion between the dominating order of those spaces and the hero's attempts to subvert this. For example in *Danny The Champion of the World* the conflict, in the form of poaching pheasants, is between the boy Danny, his father and other locals, and the land-owning Squire and his game-keepers. In *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, the rural landscape which is owned and ordered by three villainous and vile farmers, is subterraneanly reordered by the tunneling foxes and other animals.

GYPSIES

I have allocated 'Gypsies' a sub-category of their own because encounters with them, and in some cases their lifestyle, crop up on numerous occasions in accounts of country childhood idylls. Such encounters with Gypsies are usually made with reference to the exotic air of adventure, 'otherness' and even danger which hung around their 'camps', but also their apparent closeness to nature and forms of natural wisdom, and their nomadic freedom, make them positive icons within past idyll landscapes. It interesting to see the associations between childhood 'otherness' and this other form of rural 'otherness' which was once apparently part of the 'rural idyll', but which now seems so under pressure in today's cultural and ideological climates. As emerges from Sibley's work on marginalized groups, which is considered in more detail later, some aspects of this pressure take the form of the ordering and closing of spaces, and associated consequences can be seen for the otherness of Gypsies and for the otherness of children within contemporary rural spaces. Interestingly Lurie (1990), again when considering the strengths of the work of Mayne, shows how 'otherness' in some form or other, may be a key ingredient to children's literature, and rural literature, and that through this childhood itself. She suggests that Mayne's

> important characters are usually children or innocents, unsophisticated, half-literate people, *separated from the contemporary world in some way* - they are gypsies, servants and laborers, farmers in remote Yorkshire villages or inhabitants of an earlier period (p 202, emphasis added).

Thompson (1973) describes how at the farthest extent of a walk the village children often did searching for mushrooms, lay a little roadside dell where

> Once or twice when they reached the dell they got a greater thrill than even the discovery of a mushroom could give: for the Gypsies were there, their painted caravan drawn up, their poor old skeleton horse turned loose to graze, and their fire with a cooking pot over it, as though the whole road belonged to them. With men making pegs, women combing their hair or making cabbage nets, and boys and girls and dogs sprawling around, the dell was full of dark, wild life, foreign to the hamlet children and fascinating, yet terrifying (p.36).

Thompson recounts how part of this fear was engendered by the children's belief in the myth of Gypsies stealing children, but in other accounts, children overcame such and other fears and made contact with Gypsies visiting their territories. For example, Davies (1989) in his account of a year in his 'Shropshire Boyhood' set in 1939, tells how the Gypsies which came to camp on a hill near his father's farm,

> exercised a power of attraction and awe over me. I was drawn to them: I was repelled by them. But I got to know them, one side of them - the daylight side - at least ... You could sight them through the heather, on a well-worn grassy knoll. Gypsies. Watching. A cloud of patchy horses. Coloured caravans. Blue drift of camp-fire smoke. Liquid curlicues on vans; the vine-leaf traceries; concave curves and convex curves a complex geometry. Sepia-gray ancients. Black waistcoats, Spanish hats. Tall womenfolk with ink-black hair, bold rings and shawls. A line of children's washing red, blue, green. The ever watchful dogs (p.161).

Davies goes on to describe how he tags along with the Gypsy boys and they go rabbiting with their respective whippets and lurchers, ride horses bare back in competitions of horsemanship and finally, in an incident which gives him half the title of his book, *Mare's Milk and Wild Honey,* Hiram the Gypsy boy gives him a drink of milk from one of the mares which had just foaled.

Frankly, the hackneyed nature of these descriptions makes one wonder if the writers' romantic imaginations have completely taken over, but it is stressed that these stories are told as recollections of lived childhoods. Maybe they were coloured by the kind of sentiment expressed in Grahame's (1971) *Wind in The Willows* for, if not of Gypsies themselves, then at least of their nomadic existence on the open road, which Toad enthuses about while he cajoles Ratty and Mole to join him in his Gypsy caravan holiday.

> There's real life embodied in that little cart. The open road, the dusty highway, the heath, the commons, the hedgerows, the rolling downs! Camps, villages, towns, cities! Here today, up and off to somewhere else tomorrow! Travel, change, interest, excitement! The whole world before you, and a horizon that's always changing (p.35).

A similar caravan is home to Danny the eponymous hero of Dahl's *Danny the Champion of the World* (1975, 1994), part of his romantic unconventional rural idyll, it was -

> our house and our home. It was a real old gypsy wagon with big wheels and fine patterns painted all over it in yellow and red and blue. My father said it was at least a hundred and fifty years old. Many gypsy children, he said, had been born in it and had grown up

> within its wooden walls. With a horse to pull it, the old caravan must have wandered for thousands of miles along the roads and lanes of England (p. 13).

In conclusion to this section it has to be reiterated that discourses are complexly nuanced, disjointed, and contested. Their filaments come in a myriad forms and are articulated in all manner of spaces and scales. For example, *Granny's Cottage* (Fig. 2.16) shows a 'collectors plate' by Coalport, in which the rural idyll, and children within it, is portrayed. Elements of these discourses, particularly the icons already mentioned, are constantly reworked and redeployed not only maintaining their potency but also forging new forms and spaces of rural idyll. For example (Fig. 2.17) shows the lead article from Homes and Gardens Magazine (JUN 1995) in which the images of *Swallows and Amazons* are redeployed to portray a Norfolk farm house as a 'idyllic family home' (p. 62) which provides the parents with 'a perfect playground for their three children' (p 69). Similarly articles, for example, Country Living Magazine (MAY 1995) and The Western Daily Press (MAR, 23, 1995) recycle the icon that is *Cider with Rosie* and their author Laurie Lee, discourses of lifestyle and rural development conflict.

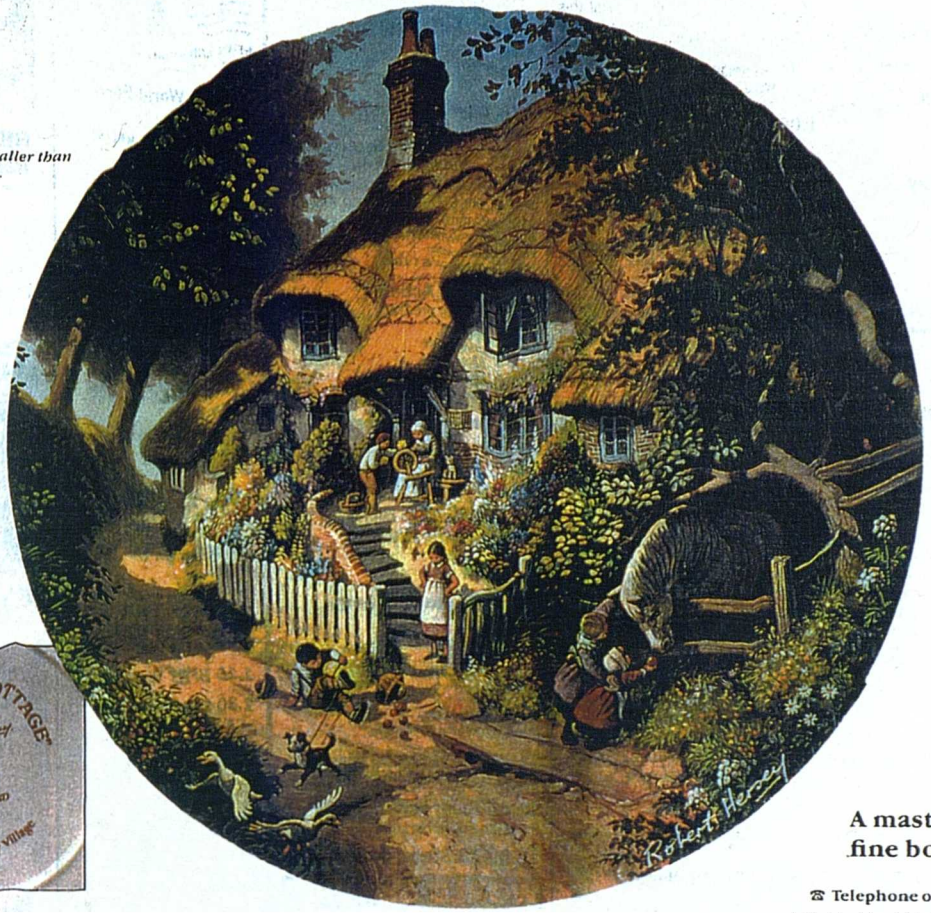
As the second part of this dissertation explores through a case study of an 'idyllic' small rural village, these popular (adult) discourses of country childhood idyll do have significant structuring effects on children's lives. The level at which they have been examined has been very generalized so there has been little reference to how these discourses of country childhood idyll, interact differently with difference within childhood, notably age and gender, and also how different rurals, for example a remote upland farmstead juxtaposed with a home counties village, may themselves generate significant differences within constructions of country childhood idyll, but the argument is that these generalized discourses set the (structuring) background on which such differences are variants of a powerful theme. These issues are considered in more detail , but before they are addressed the next two chapters bring differing perspectives on constructions of country childhood which need to be set alongside those I have set out here.

Announcing...

"GRANNY'S COTTAGE"

by Coalport

Plate shown smaller than actual size of 8".



A masterpiece in fine bone china

☎ Telephone orders on 081 391 2291

An outing to "Granny's Cottage" is such a treat! There's her gentle old horse to feed, her garden overflowing its borders with colourful blooms.... and she's sure to have baked a cake for later. Granny pauses from her spinning to accept a gift of flowers... there were going to be apples, too, until the puppy saw the ducks...

In "*Granny's Cottage*" the delights of a bygone spring day have been captured with an irresistible charm by internationally renowned artist Robert Hersey. All these delights have been preserved forever on this highest quality fine bone china collectors' plate by one of the greatest names in fine bone china, Coalport.

"*Granny's Cottage*" is a scene of timeless beauty, offering something new each time one savours it. Radiant charm, character, delicate colours, the atmosphere of tranquil days long ago and a reminder of the more simple and honest pleasures of life.

The little girl looks on disapprovingly at her brother's mishap... the loving arm supporting little sister as she offers the horse her apple.

Small touches add life to the scene .. the birdcage on the wall . the wisteria blooms hanging down over the windows . the kitten sitting next to Granny . the robin on the fence.

A Lifetime's Work

Only an artist of Robert Hersey's consummate skill can combine such intricate detail with a composition so perfectly in balance as "*Granny's Cottage*" He has devoted many years to bringing his painting style to maturity: collecting Victorian photographs, studying the work of artists of the time, exploring our loveliest villages, sketching intriguing relics of our rural past. Now these fragments, collected over nearly half a century, have been woven into this masterpiece of ceramic art, "*Granny's Cottage.*"

Coalport

Founded in the 1700's, Coalport has for centuries been renowned for the quality of its craftsmanship, and the whiteness, delicacy and translucence of its fine bone china. Coalport's historic backstamp, which enhances every "*Granny's Cottage*" plate, reaffirms this commitment to excellence.

Important First Issue

"*Granny's Cottage*" is one of a suite of studies by Mr. Hersey entitled 'The Tale of a Country Village' As the owner of "*Granny's Cottage*" you will have the opportunity (but of course, not the obligation) to acquire other plates in this important collection.

Outstanding Value

For a collector plate of such outstanding beauty and importance, one might expect to have to pay a high price. But Coalport's "*Granny's Cottage*" is just £18.95 (*plus p & p) – remarkable value for such a lovely piece.

Please Act Promptly

Orders will be handled strictly on a first come, first served basis, so to avoid disappointment, do reserve your plate now. Return the Reservation Application today to Danbury Mint, Cox Lane, Chessington, Surrey KT9 1SE.

Coalport® is a registered trade mark of Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd Barlaston Stoke on Trent Staffordshire

RESERVATION APPLICATION
Send to Danbury Mint, Cox Lane, Chessington, Surrey, KT9 1SE

"GRANNY'S COTTAGE"
by Robert Hersey

Please accept my reservation for this Granny's Cottage" plate by Coalport I need send no money now I will be billed £18.95 plus £1.50 p&p for my plate If not completely satisfied I may return my plate within thirty days of receipt for refund or replacement

☐ Tick here if you wish your plate to be charged to your credit card

No ☐ Access ☐ Visa

Card expiry date _____ SEND NO MONEY NOW

Signature _____

☐ Tick here if you will be paying by cheque or postal order

Mr/Mrs/Miss _____ (Please print clearly)

Address _____

_____

_____ Postcode _____

Overseas orders pay £2.6 per plate inclusive of airmail p&p

A division of MBI Inc H1154

Fig 2.16 'Granny's cottage' A Coalport collector's plate from the series 'The Tale of a Country Village' painted by Robert Hersey. (Advertised in the Radio Times 1993). Here the text which describes the scene is replete with references to the nature/rustic/community country idyll, which is a 'treat', has 'the delights of a bygone spring day', and 'a radiant charm'. Although this stresses the nostalgic, past setting of the bygone scene, it still remains an element of contemporary discourse through its production and marketing.

Fig 2.17 The theme of Swallows and Amazons recycled. This 'Norfolk farmhouse is an idyllic family house'. Homes and Gardens magazine (JUN, 1995).

CHAPTER 3

IDYLLS AT ALL? - CHILDREN AT ALL? CRITICAL DISCOURSES

In chapter 2 I have tried to show some of the breadth and depth notions of country childhood idylls have within our culture(s). I have also attempted to indicate how these discourses come in differing forms both in terms of context and content. But clearly such discourses, although often vivid and powerful are not hegemonic. In sympathy with Philo's (1992) concern for the possibilities of addressing concealed geographies of contemporary rural childhood which may not be so idyllic, or which may even be differently idyllic for that matter - there is not only an interest in/concern for otherness as otherness in crisis, but such is often the motivation for radical orientations.

I now want to explore various discourses which in some way challenge these powerful notions of country childhood idyll. Such critical discourses come in a number of differing forms, and most obvious are those which set out to directly challenge notions of country childhood idylls, but beyond those there are other challenges which are concerned with the state and/or the condition of childhood itself, and others still which question notions of the rural idyll and rural more generally.

In section 3.1 I briefly address those which challenge the whole concept of the rural in the contemporary UK context, and along side that ideas of the rural idyll, for if there is 'no rural' or no 'rural idyll', then ideas of 'rural childhood idylls' may be called into question. In section 3.2 I revisit some of the texts explored in chapter 2 to show that even within such discourses of childhood idyll, various fractures and glimpses of other childhoods appear, which amount to an internal counter point to the dominant theme of idyll. In section 3.3, the discourses which are specifically targeted at challenging the notion of rural childhood idyll itself are considered. These are often coming from a child welfare/policy orientation, and/or are linked to the growing awareness of children's rights and the need to look at a whole range of issues from children's point of view. In some ways these perspectives can be seen

as efforts which are attempting to meet Philo's call to uncover children's experiences from within. In section 3.4, a further set of discourses are examined which argue that childhood as an idyll itself is now lost, or at least, under various forms of threat. Often these are very generalized in nature, and are not spatially grounded in any way, thus within these laments for childhood idyll lost, ideas of rural childhood idyll are challenged. Finally in section 3.5 I consider ideas which challenge or question the whole notion of childhood as it is currently embedded in our culture(s). Such ideas are in some ways the most challenging and destabilizing for this and other work on children, and also our current visions of ourselves. They also I feel, throw up some intriguing perspectives on the structuring forces which may (partly) drive notions of country childhood idyll. I feel here that I should make clear the distinction between the material in section 3.4 and that of 3.5 and in doing so help to define both further. In the former, the concern is that childhood as a state of innocence, as an idyll, is being 'eroded' by various pressures, notably by fear, and the lowering age thresholds of sexualization and sophistication. In section 3.5 however, the very notion of childhood, and childhood as some form if idyll, - the underpinning framework of many 'end of childhood' narratives - is questioned, particularly concepts of childhood being some form of natural state. Instead notions of the (adult) cultural constructions of childhood are considered.

3.1 RURAL AT ALL, IDYLLS AT ALL?

I now want to briefly review discourses which have been critical, or at least questioning of notions of the rural idyll, and in the UK context, rurality itself. Not only does this work need to be set in these quite immediate academic contexts which have already been introduced in Chapter 1, but it will also (I hope) make contributions to those lineages of ideas within the academic rural arena.

Although the (political economy) logic of claims that the rural no longer is a meaningful classification in the UK context (Hoggart, 1988, 1990), or at least the South of England context (Thrift 1987) is visible, it has been overwhelmed by more powerful social/cultural logics. Whatmore (1993) and Crouch (1992) both point to the prevailing strength of images of the rural in popular culture and lay imaginations, (I would add, not least in the south of England), as more than an adequate response to such academic obituaries of the rural as a category of study. The 'cultural turn' in rural geography that such comments are part of, has now come to

the rural arena with some force through the work of Mormont (1990), Cloke and Milbourne (1992), Philo (1992), Halfacree (1993), Jones (1995), Houlton and Short (1995), Lowe, Murdoch and Cox (1995), and others. Such work, in various ways, has begun to examine the rural and rural idyll as some form of social and/or cultural construct, and means I feel, that the brief 'no rural' flurry will increasingly become a pared down icon used to set up new academic work considering the rural in such terms. The consideration of rural childhoods embarked upon here will add yet another layer of sedimentation over the bones of that idea. Beyond that, perhaps in some ways the status and nature of childhood provides some more specific challenges to the notion of 'no rural'. If the rural has indeed melted away in terms of political economy, and in terms of mobility between rural and urban space, this may be more so for adults than children. Children have different, and generally more limited access to mobility, and to political and economic realms, and thus in some ways, (for example geographical isolation), the rural for children, may still exist in the forms which were deemed to have gone, *as well as in* the now increasingly well explored realms of imaginative geographies.

Along with the growing interest and awareness of the significance of cultural constructions of the rural inevitably has come an interest in ideas of the rural idyll which are so ubiquitous within our national culture. Cloke and Milbourne (1992) conclude that ideas of rural idyll are complex yet little explored, stating 'the idea of a rural idyll is at best speculative at this stage. Much more needs to be known about the degree to which it is important in representations of the rural' (p. 360). More recently Cloke (1994) tells how such concerns have become central to his work, and summarises the main issues of that work,

> the notion of idyll has become an all important questioning logo in the research I have been doing in the last five or so years. How are new middle-class residents in villages responding to different cultural idylls in their decision to move, their decision to furnish, their decision to participate in local community life, and so on? What is the precise nature of theses idylls? How are they circulated and reproduced? Further, in seeking to interpret the potentially problematic nature of rural lifestyles, is the notion of 'problem' being undermined because particular representations of what rural life is like and should be like are dominant in the minds of relevant politicians, professionals and rural dwellers? Does the dominant representation of rural idyll feature happy, healthy and problem-free images of a rural life safely nestling within both a close social community and a contiguous natural environment? (p. 175)

This dissertation is squarely set in this above context defined by Cloke. Firstly I would argue that rural childhood idylls are a key element of the wider rural idyll and, as will be shown in the case study material, certainly contribute to people's decisions to move to rural locations, and to the degree they get 'involved' in the

community. Secondly, in trying to highlight popular discourses and then seeing how these are translated and applied in lay terms in a particular setting, I am in effect trying to look at how such issues are 'circulated and reproduced'. Thirdly, as will emerge throughout subsequent chapters, I have become increasingly aware of the middle-classness of the stories I am dealing in. Lastly, my aim of looking at how such discourses 'structure children's worlds', and then trying to uncover something of how the children themselves experience such worlds, is in sympathy with Cloke's desire to try and see beyond the idyll. But again I stress I am not just interested in, and setting out to uncover, otherness in terms of problem or crisis, and I feel this has been something of a difficulty in some approaches to ideas of rural idyll, and Cloke (1993) himself has called into to question such 'normative' approaches to rural studies.

The concern with the possibility of rural idyll images disguising the 'real rural' and in particular rural problems is not new and has been a feature of the work of Short (1992), James (1991), and Mingay (1989). It has in some cases I feel, led to an over compensation in the concern over rural problems with the result that ideas of idyll are dismissed as totally mythical and ideologically tainted. Such ideas are also evident in some print media, and clearly call notions of childhood idyll into question. for example, if Jonathan Meades assertion - that 'the countryside is not some rural idyll. It is breeze-block piggeries, pollution, squalor, low-lifes and incest' (Observer Review, 17 NOV 1996) - is taken at all seriously, then the possibility of country childhood idyll must recede. Patrick Wright (Guardian 16 AUG 1996), in his report on a dispute about a vicar's offer to provide summer holidays for inner city children in a Buckinghamshire village, claims that the countryside, particularly the Home Counties, is a 'dead zone', a mere 'lucrative view - a green tranquillity buoyed up by Sainsburys and the property market'. Consequently he suggests such places may be no longer 'fit places to which to send inner city children'. Here is a direct challenge to the notions of country childhood idyll, and the idea that the countryside has capacity for the healing and education of deprived children.

But such views remain fragmentary and isolated within wider constructions of the countryside as idyll. Elsewhere I have argued (Jones 1995), that people will endeavour to effectively manufacture 'the idyll', and this ties in with Halfacree's (1993) references to a postmodern rural when the sign precedes the signifier. This

work takes this idea on in the more specific setting of rural childhood idyll, where adults and parents actively encourage and structure children's lives, as far as it is possible, to match their particular vision of popular images of country childhoods.

So to summarize, this dissertation is dealing with cultural constructions of the rural, and particularly the rural as a place of childhood, and the complex local particularization of such constructions as they interact with the material and culturally embedded characteristics of a particular place. As it will be shown, such constructions are powerful shapers of contemporary place characteristics, thus any concern that the rural and rural idyll are not meaningful - even in the case study village, which could be seen as a prime example of the non-rural[1] - needs to be set aside.

3.2 DOUBLE TAKES: FRACTURED STORIES AND GLIMPSES OF OTHER COUNTRY CHILDHOODS

In this next section I will show that discourses of country childhood idyll are not hegemonic even within themselves by revealing that in the content of evocations of country idylls there is evidence of other (less idyllic) childhoods. Such evidence begins to hint at the complex and uncertain nature of these discourses, especially in terms of being adult constructions, and also to some of the possible circumstances of other, less idyllic, country childhoods. I will explore avenues which will begin to question whether such adult discourses, be they stories for childhood, or about childhood, are not so much representations of childhood, but rather idealisations of childhood. The critical point is that such idealisations inevitably will have structuring effects on the worlds of 'rural children' and the aim is not only to see how this pans out in specific terms, but also to try and 'see beyond' such idealisations in order to make some form of contact with the 'reality' of country childhood experiences.

Some of these other country childhoods are those which for one reason or another are unable to conform with the dominant bucolic accounts depicted in chapter 2. It is intriguing that even within the works which are celebrations of country childhoods and key purveyors and icons of such, glimpses of children appear who, through differing circumstances such as class, parental and state authority, physical mobility

[1] The case study village is located in an area classified as the 'most non-rural' in Cloke and Edward's (1986) index of rurality.

and gender, were excluded from the countryside idyll. Although the writers who recorded such glimpses at least did so, the very fleetingness and throw away nature of some of them, indicate how these other childhoods were all but lost to literary and popular discourses under the successive waves of positive, evocative descriptions of idyllic country childhoods.

3.2.1 Indoors

I begin with the example below to show just how fleeting such glimpses could be. In *Cider with Rosie* there is literally just a glimpse, through a window, of another 'country childhood' as the gang of 'outdoor' village children paid a visit to a local farm. Lee writes 'Wells, the farmer had a young sick son more beautiful than a girl. He waved from his window as we trooped into the farmyard, and wouldn't live to last out the winter' (p.139). The story then proceeds with the continuing adventures of the outdoor children. The indoor children, those sick, or disabled, or kept at home by the authority of parents, were inevitably excluded from these worlds of outdoor roaming and play which makes up the body of the country childhoods of popular discourses, and, mostly, the stories of *their country childhoods remain untold.*

The conflict between parental/adult authority and the living of an outdoor country childhood, is a theme of the semi-autobiographical sequence of four books by Henry Williamson, who became famous for his novel *Tarka the Otter. This* sequence of four works, with the overall title *The Flax of Dreams,* portrays first childhood, then boyhood, youth and early manhood. The first two volumes of this series *The Beautiful Years*, and *Dandelion Days*, as their titles hint at, are celebrations of childhood, specifically country childhood, but there is also a sub-narrative of threat which casts a shadow over the outdoor life. As Keith (1975) puts it in *The Beautiful Years*

> we are offered the vision of a *potential rural paradise*; the countryside around 'Rookhurst' is presented as an *ideal environment for the growth of a healthy harmonious soul.* But even at this early stage threatening clouds become visible. (p. 218, emphasis added).

These storm clouds are the threat of unsympathetic adult authority coming between the central character, a boy called Willie, and the countryside he longs to explore. In the first book this authority comes in the form of a remote and authoritarian father. The opening sequence of *The Beautiful Years* depicts Willie, then seven years old, out watching the lambing on the farm, talking with the farm hands, and

delightedly meeting with a Gypsy who lives semi-rough in the woods. When Willie returns home after dark his father spots him, and quizzing the housekeeper about his movements comments 'you mustn't encourage him (to go out). He's wild enough as it is' (p.17). The father then confronts Willie who at first tries to lie his way out of the situation, knowing what would follow -

> 'What were you doing out so late at night' ...
> 'Answer me Willie!'
> His son lay with his face in the pillow
> 'Seeing the lambs, please, Father.'
> 'Didn't I say you were not to go out?'
> 'Yes, Father.'
> 'Very well then.'
> A sob came from the boy's throat. His father saw that he was fully dressed.
> 'Take down your trousers. Don't keep me waiting!'
> His father gave him six cuts with the cane; before and after each one his son screamed with fear ... (1932, p.18).

Keith (1975) then describes how in the second book *Dandelion Days* the adult authority standing between Willie and his relationship with the landscape switches from his father to his school, the policy of which 'seems to be to stamp out the imaginative spirit which Willie has developed in his natural surroundings' (p. 218).

So here are just two examples of how children might be bound indoors and thus excluded from the major landscapes of country childhood visions; illness and/or disability, and some form of authority which did not buy into the celebration of children as wild, free, innocent and at one with nature, but rather saw them as things to be tamed or ordered, by amongst other means, separating them from wild settings and influences.

3.2.2 Class Divides

Another issues that leaps from the pages of these texts is that of the differing opportunities class status sometimes offered children to partake in the country childhood idyll. This is particularly so in the case of Jefferies' *Bevis*, which is a text critical in the cultural constructions of visions of country childhoods. In *Bevis* the eponymous hero has constructed a raft on which he hopes to navigate the brook which runs through his 'private kingdom'. Unfortunately the craft is too heavy for him to drag from the workshop to the launch site. Having tried to convince one of the farm hands to help him, who had refused because of the presence of the bailiff, overseer of the farm laborers, he next sees the carter's lad who is working with one of the farm horses -

> 'Stop' said Bevis 'stop directly, and hitch the chain on my raft.'

> The boy hesitated: he dared not disobey the carter, and he had been in trouble for pleasing Bevis before.
> 'This instant' said Bevis, stamping his foot; 'I'm your master.'
> 'No; that you beant', said the boy slowly, very particular as to the facts; 'your feyther be my master.'
> 'You do it this minute,' said Bevis, hot in the face, 'or I'll KILL you; but if you'll do it I'll give you - sixpence.' (p. 18).

Finally the boy concurs and, 'once embarked in the business worked with a will...highly delighted himself with the idea... and he and Bevis together pushed the raft into the stream' (ibid). Bevis's friend Mark then arrives and all three start trimming and testing the vessel until -

> 'Yaa-you!' they heard a rough voice growling, like a dog muttering a bark in his throat, and instantly the carter's lad felt a grip on the back of his neck. It was the bailiff who marched him up the meadow, holding the boy by the neck with one hand and leading the cart-horse by the other. Bevis and Mark were too full of the raft even to notice that their assistant had been hauled off (p. 20).

This extract sharply points up the difference in the country childhood experiences of children of differing classes. While Bevis is free to play, other children are working on his father's farm. As will be shown, such a differentiation is corroborated by other accounts of country childhoods, but it is the (middle class) idyllic experiences as described in *Bevis* which can be seen as a pivotal work not only in the literary depiction of country childhoods but, to an extent, in the living of them also. Keith (1975) tells how Edward Thomas and Henry Williamson both read and were greatly influenced by *Bevis* when they themselves were boys, and similarly Carpenter and Prichard (1984) suggest that the work of William Mayne, owes 'a considerable debt to Richard Jefferies' *Bevis* '. Not only was this 'most famous of all evocations of childhood manipulations of space' read by children, (Ward, 1990, p. 89), but it was also re-inscribed through the work of such children who grew to be writers of their own country idylls, and key contributors to its literary construction.

Of the era in which *Bevis* was set Horn (1974) writes that 'most working-class country children had little time for recreation free from the cares of school, household chores and paid employment' (p.150). Humphries, Mack and Perks (1988) also caution against assuming that all country children had equal play opportunities, especially in that some children had little time for any form of play at all, and that such circumstances persisted well into the present century. They quote Joan Hillier who was 'one of four children and had a strict upbringing on a dairy farm in Yorkshire in the 1920's', who recalled,

> It seemed I did nothing except work. It was all work and not much play. Early to bed and early to rise. Cows had to be milked before going to school and then delivered after the

> second milking on getting back from school in the evening. It was tea and bed by 6.30 (p. 64).

Thus *Bevis* was perhaps portraying the exception rather than the common place. Such differences even came through in the visual construction of rural childhood images, not so much in the opportunity for play, but in the result of the physical appearances that the different childhood lifestyles resulted in. Short (1992), in order to illustrate the gulf which often lies between the image and the reality of rural life, and in particular the image held and manufactured by the middle classes and the reality experienced by the working classes, uses the example of an image of idyllic rural childhood. He recounts how the photographer Henry Peach Robinson, when composing a pastoral scene of country peasant children gathering May, 'found it more effective to have the daughters of landowners pose as 'peasant girls' than to use real working families' (p.3). Many of the classic rural set stories for childhood also have been highlighted as being, in some cases, painfully middle class. This is particularly so of Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* and Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows.* Other works such as A. A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* stories and Richmal Crompton's *William* stories also share such a class location, (William's household employs domestic staff) but somehow have transcended the constrictions this imposes on the other works. This middle class theme reemerges strongly but in different form within the case study material.

3.2.3 Access to Country Childhood Spaces

Access to the countryside is a vital issue within all this, and there does seem to be some tension between the vision of the countryside being open to children, and the on-going disquiet about public access to the countryside in general as expressed, for example by Shoard (1987). Blunden and Curry (1990) in their assessment of the legacy of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, which they consider 'laid the foundation of many of the statutory conservation and recreation powers that exist in the countryside today' (p. 1), conclude that - 'the access lobby' (which along with the conservation lobby was key in the build up to the act) 'has never really succeeded in its primary goal' (p. 36). Thus organizations such as the Ramblers Association, founded in 1935, and contemporary revivals of the mass-trespass incidents, still have much the same objectives as when they started out. Perhaps, as in Shoard's (1980) analysis, and in accounts such as *Bevis,* the fact that children were drawn to the overgrown, abandoned corners meant that conflict

was avoided. But in the recollections of Elizabeth Cornick, quoted by Humphries, Mack and Perks (1988) she tells how, as children, her and her companions -

> had to watch out for the farmers and landowners though: there were big notices saying 'TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED' and if they did prosecute, you didn't stand a chance because the magistrate was always a farmer too ... there was apple scrumping in the farmer's orchard, risking his riding crop around your legs (p. 63).

It is also important to be sensitive to intersections of categories such as access and class, and not just to see them as discrete categories. This can be illustrated from a scene in L. P. Hartley's *The Go Between* (1958), where the central boy character, Leo wanders from the big house where he is staying out into the surrounding estate farmland and ends up 'rick sliding' in a local farmyard. When he is first spotted, the farmer is not pleased and greets him - 'what the hell do you think you are doing here? I've a good mind to give you the biggest thrashing you've ever had in your life' (p. 79). But after a brief exchange of explanation, the farmer's tune changes, "Ah!' he said, and his voice and manner changed completely, 'then you are from the Hall' (p. 80). Understandably, from the farmer's point of view, who was after all partly tenanted to the Hall estate, this boy was welcome to wander the fields and play in the farmyard, but in the apology given for the hostile reception, it is clear that other local boys who 'drive (the farmer) half demented' were not so, and warranted the threat originally made. Access to the spaces of rural childhood idyll is usually assumed, but there are reasons to doubt that it is so unproblematic in general, and also that all children have similar degrees of access, and there may be, as the story above shows, a class bias with children's access to the countryside. As is shown later, this is one of the major concerns with some of the discourses which challenge notions of idyll, and a important theme in the case study material.

Here I have dealt with three sets of quite obvious forms of other country childhood stories that stood out to me in the contexts I considered. Clearly there are many more besides, and in particular differences in age, gender and ethnicity come to mind, and the former two are dealt with elsewhere. But these can be seen as the 'high profile' forms of otherness which are often (and rightly so) referred to in relation to 'neglected geographies'. But as I have stressed these categories can intersect to delineate more subtle forms of otherness, and beyond these there will also be other less obvious elements. I will end this section by mentioning one such 'shade of otherness', which also comes from the extract in the *Go Between;* and to add a note of advocacy for the way I have used such texts, I felt when I first came

across it, that here, prompted by the briefest passage, was an interesting and challenging notion about country childhood which I had not really considered. When Leo comes across the farmyard on his walk through the countryside the narration states that such a place was a 'challenge', 'an accepted symbol of romance' and adventure, in other words, was redolent with the imagery of country childhoods. But after this initial reaction, Leo finds himself reluctant to take up this accepted position: and particularly the apparently common game of 'rick-sliding'. It is described how of the 'straw-stack' there was 'plenty left to slide down' (p. 79). *but* -

> I didn't really want to, but there was no excuse whatever not to, if I was to retain my self-respect. I could not help acting as if the eyes of the whole school were upon me. suddenly a slight panic seized me; I longed to get the sliding over...(ibid)

Here a boy is depicted as feeling obliged to do the (male) country child thing by, albeit remote, peer group pressure. There is a kind of macho determinism going on. Not only does such a glimpse challenge the homogenization of childhood responses to, at least, the physical adventure element of country childhood idyll, it also challenges the homogenization of male childhood response to this perhaps male loaded element of country childhood.

3.2.4 Poverty

Sadie Ward's (1991) *The countryside Remembered,* is a collection of photographs of past country life particularly concentrating on scenes of agricultural labour. These are, almost without exception, in harmony with notions of the past rural idyll, (although there is a sense of hard, but mostly dignified manual labour, by men and women), and as in fig 2.12, these often contain children. But there is one image which stands out in stark contrast. This shows an agricultural worker with his wife and five of his six children, standing by a small windowless tin shack (fig 3.1) which was their home for six-and-a-half years. Not only is this glimpse of rural poverty quite startling within the overall collection, but it is so within the wider body of depiction of Britain rural heritage. Unlike similar images of American rural poverty, particularly Walker Evans' images of the 'dust bowl' and the agricultural depression of the early decades of this century, which have become some of the seminal images of documentary and journalistic photography, this example of an image of British rural poverty is a rare exception, and a reminder of the images and stories of rural poverty and children's lives within that, which have remained largely untold.

Fig 3.1 'A Farmworker's home' (from Sadie Ward, 1991, p. 65).

3.2.5 Fractured Stories

As well as the other country childhoods which can be detected within the detail of country childhood idyll discourses, I am also interested in how the latter begins to expose the possibility that they are not merely adult *representations* of country childhoods but rather are adult *idealizations* of country childhoods. This clearly has implications for how we see children in the countryside and how their lives are structured. The stories I have been dealing in are all adult constructions of childhoods, and of countrysides fit for childhoods. They are complex constructions formed of memories, imaginations and observations. As such they indicate adult perceptions of country childhoods, but the question remains in what balance do they consist of memory, imagination and observation? To what extent do all these accounts reflect, firstly, specific forms of country childhoods that were actually lived out, and, secondly, the more general idea that there is a seemingly obvious and powerful affinity between childhood and the countryside?

To illustrate these points I want to briefly re-consider both the extracts from Lee and Shoard. But before that I will add more to the story of Henry Williamson whose stories of Willie have been touched upon in the previous section. Keith (1975) maintains that although fictionalized, the portrayal of the country childhood in the four books of *The Flax of Dreams,* presents 'the essence of Williamson's early life'. But between the living out of this childhood and the writing about it or anything else, as an adult, Williamson at the age of 21 had experienced fighting in the trenches of the First World War. This was to be 'the crucial experience of his life' (ibid, p. 213), and according to John Carey (1995) 'coloured everything that followed' (Weekend Telegraph, 25 NOV 1995). Thus the country childhood Williamson remembers and celebrates in his writing is seen through this most terrible of filters. Keith suggests that the more Williamson looked back in an effort to explain the causes of the war he experienced, 'the more he found it in the separation of urban man and natural life' (ibid, p. 214). He quotes Williamson's assertion that - 'Wars are made ... by mass-escapists from indoor and pavement living; the pale-faced men whose natural instincts are repressed' (ibid). So when we read Williamson's account of a country childhood, it is not a simple account, but that of an adult loaded with burdens and ambitions way beyond what might first appear.

As well as such retrospective loading of childhood, there is the more general point concerning memory and time. Lee (1962) states in a prefacing note to *Cider with Rosie* that 'the book is a recollection of early boyhood, and some of the facts may be distorted by time'. The question is, to what extent? The book apparently represents a real landscape, Lee went to school in Slad, the village in the book, and still lives there at the time I now write. Unlike the landscape of, say, Hardy's Wessex, it is not apparently fictionalized with name of towns changed, and geographical features rearranged. But perhaps, as Jillian Tindall (1991) asserts of Hardy's Wessex, Lee's landscape is a 'solidified' 'dream-country' where the 'true' details are used by the author to project their fiction or 'myth'. Lee gives a clear description of the village; its layout, the materials it is built with, the sources of employment available to its inhabitants. He talks of trips to Gloucester and Weston-Super-Mare. It is a real landscape, it feels solid, and can still be explored today. This carries the memories along, and although 'the facts may be distorted by time' the realness of the landscape gives a realness to the action that takes place within it. *Cider with Rosie* was written some 35 years after the events recorded occurred,

and the question which arises here, and throughout this work, is to what extent the memory of the adult fictionalizes the childhood being recalled. In the passage quoted earlier recounting the games played in the summer night times, there is a small narrative flaw which gives an indication of how memories of childhood can be fictionalized.

It is clear from the context of the passage that it is set in high summer, the game starts 'when darkness fell', and apparently went on all night, ('we were off again then, through the waking night ... while our quarry slipped into another parish and would not be found for hours'). The next line is, 'round about midnight we ran them to earth, exhausted under a haystack' (p.153). The game apparently lasts all night, but in fact ends at midnight, perhaps only two hours after darkness would have fallen in high summer. There are probably complex origins of the idealization of these events. Firstly children when involved in games such as that described, are considered to experience time and space differently than the more prosaically experienced perspective of adults. Lurie (1990) says of the 'child's or primitive's relationship to time: it is not regulated by clock and calendar, but is free to expand an contract according to subjective perception' (p. 203). In the case of Lee the time the adventure takes place appears to be expanded. Similarly space can be expanded also. One of the few vivid memories from my pre-teen childhood is of my older brothers building a (seemingly) complex maze of tunnels and chambers out of bales of hay in one of the big dutch barns on our farm. To me it seemed positively labyrinthine, and given the utter darkness and silence if one was alone or became isolated, it was stomach churningly exciting/scary. I have often considered, including prior to embarking on this work, that the spatial reality must have been far more modest than my imagination drew it. So some children's games may have an element of immanent idealization and expansion built into them both in terms of space and time, and possibly action also. Compounding this, adult processes of memory, which may well be cross fertilized with all sorts of other agendas, put these idealized events through a further powerful distilling processes. Not only that, but memory inevitably will select only certain events and moments to work upon. So Lee's accounts of his childhood no doubt have, at their core, past events, but through the processes of selection and idealization within the memory, and in the processes of writing the book, he may have selected the highlights, the events that

mean most to him, which then go through a further process of idealization, driven by his adult longing.

The story that Shoard tells is compelling in its own way too. She is passionate and eloquent in her polemic against the *'Theft of the Countryside'*. Apart from her obviously genuine concern about the consequences of countryside change and their impact on various social groups, including children, the latter are also a useful factor for her to deploy in her overall argument. But as is so often the case, this sort of story of lost, or about to be lost, golden ages, has been told many times before. Within his now famous analysis of images of *The Town and The Country*, Williams (1985) considers the poet Clare's lamentations for the loss of the countryside of his childhood in the enclosures and other agricultural developments of the 18th century. Here Williams shows how these stories are more complex than purely tales of material landscape change.

That material change did and still does occur is not in doubt, and Williams extracts from the work of Clare that the 'primitive land' was 'being directly altered: the brooks diverted, the willows felled, in drainage and clearance' (p.138). (Much the same sort of land change that Shoard refers to). But Williams adds that 'particular trees, and a particular brook, by which I played as a child, has gone in just that way, in the last few years, in an improved use of marginal land' (p.138), and he goes on to explore how the landscapes that Clare laments were the landscapes of his childhood, *and it becomes uncertain which is being mourned.* The joys of childhood are imprinted onto whatever landscape they are acted out on. The process of adult recollection tends to convert such particular memories into 'sweet vision of the past'. Thus 'the natural images of this Eden of childhood seem to compel a particular connection, at the very moment of their widest generality. Nature, the past and childhood are temporarily but powerfully fused' (p.139).

Children are celebrated for their agency and their imagination, and so it is possible the joys of childhood can be imprinted on the most seemingly unpromising landscapes. Graham Swift in *Waterland* (1984) recounts how the fens of Norfolk, a landscape which both Clare and Shoard would bemoan, could still become a magical place in child's eye - 'and yet this land so regular, so

prostrate, so tamed and cultivated, would transform itself, in my five- or six-year-old mind, into an empty wilderness ... A fairy-tale land, after all' (p. 2).

So the relationship between childhood and landscape as recorded in adult discourses cannot be taken to be straight forward. The landscapes of past childhoods may be lost and with them adults feel childhood itself is lost. But children today may be interacting with the new landscapes which in turn will become the subject of future adult lamentations for lost landscapes and lost childhoods.

3.2.6 Children's Stories?

Finally in this section I want to expand this questioning of adult discourses of country childhood as represented in various stories. Carpenter (1994) when considering the nature of British children's literature suggests that the common emotional fate of the upper-class British male, such as Barrie, Grahame and Milne, who all wrote classic children's books, meant that,

> the imaginative, intuitive, emotional self becomes imprisoned within a shell of stoicism, and can only be released by evoking the golden age before the cloud of misery descended. Hence the British obsession with children's books, *which at their best are not books for children at all, but books for and by adults who need to re-enter the emotional Eden of their earliest years*. (Sunday Times, 29 JUN 1994, emphasis added).

In reviewing a biography of Grahame by Prince and referring also to an earlier biography by Green, Carpenter points out that there is disturbing evidence that Grahame, and Barrie who wrote *Peter Pan,* and Milne who wrote *Winnie-the-Pooh* all had difficult relationships with their own sons. Although Christopher Robin Milne 'survived to write a masterpiece .. dedicated to proving that he was NOT the Christopher Robin' (ibid), two of Barrie's adopted sons are believed to have committed suicide, as Alastair Grahame is known to have done at the age of 19. Carpenter's explanation is that Kenneth Grahame and his wife Elspeth, who spoke together and to their child in 'baby-talk', were living out fantasy childhoods in which a real child was a jarring intrusion. In a recent addition to this theme, Tom Hibbert wrote (Observer, Life, 15 DEC 1996), in his review of the Channel 4 program *Secret Lives* (Channel 4 16 DEC 1996) on Enid Blyton, that it revealed that 'she didn't really like children at all. She preferred her dogs to her two daughters, it seems, and she didn't much like her dogs, either'. Such unnerving stories about the authors of 'classic' children's literature and their relationship with the 'real' children in their lives are also evident in the life and work of 'Lewis Carol' author of *Alice in Wonderland*, and Rose (1984) takes these and Barrie's *Peter Pan* to explore these issues. She

sets out to ask not what children want or need from such literature, but 'what it is that adults, through literature, want or demand of the child' (p.137). Although her conclusions are complex and wide ranging, the point relevant to this work is that children's stories are not speaking for, or even to the child but rather about the child, a child of adult imagining. Such analyses begin to call into question the whole concept of country childhood idylls at large in, at least, literary discourses which have in turn, fueled more extensive popular discourses. Such doubts closely tie in with questions which are being asked of adult constructions of childhood in general. It needs to be asked to what extent these constructions are primarily about adults rather than children.

3.3 RURAL CHILDHOOD IDYLLS?

Having outlined above some alternative constructions of country childhoods, I now want to turn to discourses which are specifically critical of ideas of rural childhood idyll. Some aspects of these have been previously flagged in the form of lamentations for idyll lost discussed in chapter 2, and like Shoard, they often take the line that although the countryside was, and to an extent still can be an idyll for childhood, it has come under eroding pressure from a variety of sources which can be general to childhood or more specifically to rural childhoods. But some of these critical discourses, in parallel with ideas which suggest that the rural idyll should be seen as an entirely mythical creation, go as far as suggesting that the rural childhood idyll is not only at odds with the condition of contemporary rural childhood, but has never reflected any true account of children's lives.

It should be clear by now that challenging popular images of country childhoods was the motivation of Ward's *The Child in the Countryside.* Through Ward's analysis comes an awareness of the complexity of notions of idyll and their relationship with the patterns of lived childhoods. It is over simplistic to consider the idyll in terms of all or nothing, mythical or real, historical or contemporary frameworks. Ward mixes concerns over idealisations which never reflected any actuality with concerns over material landscape change which inevitably do ground notions of idylls, or idyll lost, in everyday practice. He also challenges the unidirectional nature of nostalgia, building instead an complex image of differing positive and negative elements of country childhoods waxing and waning through time.

The other major source of discourses which challenge or question notions of country childhood idylls are various state and non-governmental organisations which are concerned with some or other aspect of children's welfare and rights in general, or in some cases, rural children in particular. These initiatives are often framed within a context of looking at the reality of contemporary rural childhood precisely because it has been, and still remains mostly concealed from lay, popular, professional and academic discourses (see Jones 1995) by popular portrayals of childhood idyll. Such an approach is encapsulated by Allison Marshall (1993) -

> There is an image of the English countryside which conjures up a picture of woods and fields in which children can play, climb trees, build dens and fish in streams and ponds. But that idyll of rural life is far from the reality which so many children in rural areas now experience.
>
> Modern methods of agriculture have transformed the rural landscape, cutting down those nooks and crannies where children once played in safety and introducing larger, heavier and faster machinery and vehicles as new dangers. Pesticides and other agricultural chemicals have brought new hazards to the land itself. And an increasing volume of transport, and heavy agricultural vehicles, mean that rural roads are as dangerous as any.
>
> The city child faces similar problems of reduced space and dangerous traffic. But whereas the needs of the urban child have been recognised - albeit inadequately - in the provision of play spaces, parks and leisure centres, the play needs of the rural child have gone largely unrecognised (pp 10, 11).

As play has become a key element to ideas of childhood, it has developed into one of the basic rights ascribed to children, Franklin and Franklin (1996), National Voluntary Council for Children's Play (1994), and much of the drive of discourses critical of country childhood idylls has been directed at the last point Marshall makes about play opportunities in the countryside, although issues of welfare, poverty and isolation are also prominent.

3.3.1 Places to Play and Access to Them

The concern which Ward and a number of other studies express about play in the countryside revolves around two main themes. Firstly, the extent to which the spaces of the countryside which are suitable and attractive for children, and in which they did play, are being tidied away by the changes in rural land use practices. Secondly, there is concern that compounding this reduction of available places to play, is an increasing reduction in children's opportunity to gain access to such places.

In order to address such issues The National Playing Fields Association, along with an affiliated local group, the Humberside Playing Fields Association (1984),

conducted a survey on play among young children within rural Humberside. In this project which covered 10 villages, after pilot studies, 176 one to one, ten minute interviews were conducted with children aged 10 and 11, (90 boys and 86 girls), in which 4 questions were asked -

a) When you play outside with your friends where do you like to play best? *(prompt -why).*

b) I want you to use your imagination. If you could choose anything you liked, what would be a really nice place for children to play *(prompt - what about farmers' fields).*

c) What places would you like to play in but aren't allowed *(prompt -what about farmer's fields).*

d) Do you have a park or playground near you to play in? Do you go there? *(prompt - why)* (ibid, p. 8).

In the research report the limitations of such an approach and the problems of evaluation such material are considered, but it does appear to be a carefully constructed attempt to listen to what the children had to say about playing in their rural environments, and the conclusions merit some consideration. The first point made is that the responses between girls and boys were different enough to warrant being differentiated throughout the subsequent analysis of material. In that analysis, five categories were formed: 1, Children's Activities: 2, Places Where the Children Play: 3, Forbidden Places: 4, Local Parks and Play Areas: 5: Description of an Ideal Play Area: and these were then broken down into further detail and conclusions drawn. Within the report there is much detail and quotes from children which is very difficult to do justice to here, but a complex picture emerges of opportunity and restriction in terms of play, widely differentiated by gender, location of house, parental attitudes and individual preferences and fears. In the conclusions, although it was acknowledged that 'children play in a variety of places other than play areas and back gardens' (p. 31), the notion of idyll was called into question in the largest section of the conclusion - 'Many Places are not Accessible to Children', which opened,

> if children are unable to go to a place, they will not be able to play there however "good" a play place it is. This seeming truism is still a crucial factor. The survey discovered many places, generally assumed accessible to rural children are, in fact, out of bounds (p. 31).

This section went on to consider what sets of factors were revealed as restricting children's access to the local environment.

> **Distance from home**. Regular play places are often near home and are used even if they are found boring. Interesting play places at a distance are not used as regularly. Using ponies and

> bicycles seem to extend this distance. **Busy roads**. Some children are not allowed to cross busy roads or play near them, thus being prevented access to many interesting places. **Serious hazards**. The dangers of rivers, ponds, farm machinery and derelict buildings, have been firmly impressed on the children. Most of them seemed to understand the dangers and keep away from such places. **The risk of nuisance**. The children were often forbidden in places where they are considered likely to be a nuisance:- near houses (with balls); on cricket pitches; in other people's gardens; in church yards and cemeteries; around garage blocks; on the roofs of garages and sheds; in corn or barley fields; in fields with animals; in crop fields; in places with bales of hay and straw (there is also danger of fire). **Private land**. Fields, paddocks and woods are usually out of bounds although children of the owners and their friends will often be allowed to play in such places. **Parental influence**. some children are not allowed to get dirty, climb trees or play out of sight of home. Bearing in mind that these children are ten and eleven years old, this seems like over-zealous care. **Child conformity with adult wishes**. Some children are obviously inhibited in the places they choose to play. They appear not to wish to test the limits they feel adults impose. Others know the rules, break them and try not to get caught.
>
> *The limitations on many of the children in the survey are considerable and affect their activities and expectations.* (pp. 31-32, emphasis added).

In these findings the fears and concerns parents and children felt reflect issues, such as traffic, stranger danger, which are being seen to contribute to a crisis in childhood in general, and also with fears more specific to rural spaces, as exemplified by the fears of child safety on the farm.

Ward (1990) draws upon the above report in expressing his concern for opportunities children living in the countryside have for play, but unlike the report which focuses on access to play spaces, Ward's concern centres more on the destruction of suitable places for play. He suggests that in the 'early post-war years' the countryside and the suburbs were

> full of patches of land which were in a transition between one land use and another. These areas of "un-make" or "no-man's land", eyesores to the adult world or official world, were of course rich in potential for children,...but (by the 1980s) they now seem to have been used up as building land, leaving only intensively farmed land with few hedges or wild areas (p. 94).

He goes on to complain of 'the municipal urge to tidy up everywhere and cut each blade of grass or, in the eastern counties at least, to turn every patch of ground to commercially viable use' (ibid). Putting these trends alongside the countryside changes recorded in Shoard's *The Theft of the Countryside*,- 'already a quarter of our hedgerows, 24 million hedgerow trees, thousands of acres of down and heathland, a third off our woods and hundreds of ponds streams, marshes and flower rich meadows have disappeared', Ward concludes that the countryside as a provider of suitable childhood environments is being tidied away.

To describe the consequences of such processes Ward uses a portrait of a village in South Holderness given by Joe Santaniello (1978), a local teacher, who reported the village as being,

> huddled in a tight island of buildings surrounded by a huge hedgeless, treeless plain of fields, many over 50 acres in extent...(Here) if we imagine children racing across buttercup-spangled meadows and shining up forest oaks, let's forget it. There are few villages in Holderness with common land and fewer still with access to pasture lands...The only open land was a disused railway line which provided a haven for wild strawberries and gorse and the only place in the parish where the children could go exploring. But covetous eyes are already upon it and no doubt one day it will be ploughed up and fenced off. Then the children will only have their gardens to play in. (pp, 100-102).

Thus Ward feels key play activities such as den building has been driven into (large enough) gardens, and that no longer does our image of country childhood - one of

> access to space... games on the village green...the ability to wander endlessly, to hang around in the farmyard and help at harvest time..."larking about" in the hay field, digging, building dens, climbing trees, hiding in bushes and splashing in water (p. 99).

hold true.

It is worth noting at this stage that Ward does locate his analyse in both space and time. Like Humphries, Mack, and Perks (1988) he feels that the landscapes of pre-war agricultural depression, and the differing agricultural practices of the time, (stock-grazing in favour of cereal production), produced a 'broken down picturesque landscape with its ruined barns, blocked ditches and overgrown hedges (which) was an ideal habitat both for wildlife and for children's play' [2] (p. 100), and that domestic structures and parental attitudes allowed children the freedom to exploit these settings. In terms of space, Ward is careful to regionalise his analysis to 'the eastern counties' he is most familiar with. This not only can be tied in with Cloke and Milbourne's (1993) notions of regional and local scales of rural cultures and rural idylls, but also brings out the point that such discourses of rural childhood idylls, and criticisms of it, will be effected by the local contexts they are set in.

More recently another body concerned with play and recreation - The National Children's Play and Recreation Unit - has turned its attention to play opportunities in rural areas as part of a more general attempt to re-assess the status of play opportunity and provision in the UK. Their initiative 'Children Today' (1992), 'explored issues of rural isolation, urban deprivation and equal opportunities, and *questioned preconceptions about play in towns, the countryside and for disabled*

---

[2] Here the conflation between children and nature considered in chapter 2 is strong enough to suggest their need for common 'habitats'.

children' (p.11 emphasis added). This was done by a programme of 'action research and the establishment of good practice' in three designated areas, Devon, Leicestershire and the north-west, where the project teams worked with local authorities and volunteer organisations on a number of initiatives. The rural elements of the projects were sited in Devon which was taken to be a 'typically rural county', and also Leicester, where both rural and urban districts were selected.

In Devon the projects set up were: ***Out-of-School Guidelines***, developing guidelines for running out-of-school activities for children in Devon: ***Teignbridge Play Policy***; working across departments to produce a corporate play policy for Teignbridge District Council: ***Country Play Days,*** involving children and adults developing play provision for small rural communities in Torridge: ***Torridge Playwork Training***, developing playwork training and accreditation in isolated rural areas of Torridge: ***Heathfield Project***, improving play provision on an expanding housing estate in Teinbridge. In Leicester the rural sited initiatives were the ***Wing Village Play Area*** and ***The Rutland Play Forum.***

Set in the context of the 1989 Children Act which 'envisages, as part of a wider policy, high quality play provision', these pro-active action research initiatives were designed to pump-prime long term projects and play provision in the project areas which would continue once the project teams has withdrawn, and also to set up examples of best practice for other local authorities to follow. The assumption behind stressing rural as well as urban settings was that neither could be assumed to be a 'natural' provider of play opportunities and ideal childhood environments. The Devon based Country Playdays Initiative reported, 'there are few places to play in the countryside. There is little common land and large farms, with their machinery and chemicals, are private property, not places to play' (p. 4). Similarly The Rutland Play Forum, although it did not attract the level of public participation hoped for, turned out to be 'extremely vocal about the needs of children in rural areas' and concluded *'the myth of the rural child as being able to play in a wide variety of stimulating environments was entirely dispelled'.* (This finding was in common with the work of Children Today Devon)' (p. 25, emphasis added). The lack of support for the Forum, and its other main findings listed below, perhaps are indicative of the strength of professional, popular, and lay discourses of country childhood idyll overriding such concerns, for the Forum also concluded that -

> There is a frequent failure of local authorities - county, district and parish - to provide play space and play areas; many of the areas were dilapidated and dangerous.
>
> Available resources and activities for children were concentrated in the towns of Oakham and Uppingham. This, coupled with the lack of public transport meant that poorer families in rural areas were doubly disadvantaged.
>
> People who were interested in or committed to playwork felt isolated and *almost dubbed as 'peculiar'* for being concerned . (ibid, emphasis added).

Such on going critical discourses which challenge the presumptions about the opportunities children have to play in the countryside, either through the loss of suitable spaces, and/or the access to the dwindling spaces that do remain, if accurate, negate the major part of the country childhood idyll, for without the spaces and the benefits they bring many of the components of country childhood idyll, as described in Chapter 2, are lost.

3.3.2 Isolation, Welfare and Poverty

But (suitable) space and access to it, are not the only grounds on which notions of country childhoods idylls are questioned. Other factors, particularly isolation, and issues of poverty and welfare provision are also of concern. Most of the accounts of childhood idyll, and even the critical accounts referred to above are related to village communities, but obviously some children will grow up in more isolated households where (pre or out of school) contact with other children is problematic, or live in villages where there are few other children and/or few facilities to enable contact, (such as toddler groups, and play groups). Jenny Hargrave (1991) states

> It may sound an ideal situation for children to be brought up in a rural community, but there can be some drawbacks. you may live far from other young families, with few opportunities for socialising; you may not have your own transport; playgroup facilities may not be available in your village and the nearest library and toyshop may be miles away (p. 12).

She then goes on to describe an initiative funded by an Education Support Grant and run as a Rural Dorset Development scheme which established three 'Play and Learn' vans which toured rural communities in Dorset offering support, information and play equipment to parents and young children in an effort to ameliorate the problems of rural childhood isolation. Ward's concern over isolation takes on a further dimension in that he is sensitive to the isolation children may feel from mainstream, predominately urban culture, which they will almost inevitably experience through various forms of media, or for those with little access to such, the manifestation of it through school and other peer group situations.

Issues of poverty in the countryside, and concern over how such problems are lost behind the luminosity of idyll constructions, have attracted some study, for example Cloke, Milbourne and Thomas (1995) whose study is aptly subtitled, 'Out of Sight Out of Mind'; McLaughlin (1985, 1986); and Walker (1978). Poverty has also been touched upon in more general analyses of contemporary Rural Britain(Blundon and Curry, 1985; Newby, 1985. But if these studies can be seen as quite rare efforts to address such issues, the more specific concern about poverty and its intersection with childhood are rarer still, although both Cloke, Milbourne and Thomas (1995) and Walker (1978) were published under the auspices of the Child Poverty Action Group. But recently this issue has been addressed by Davis and Ridge (1997) on behalf of the Children's Society. Here the research included the twin aims of 'highlighting the experiences of children and young people in rural areas', and 'to explore the interlocking effects of rurality and low income and reveal through children's voices their experiences of exclusion and marginalisation' (p. 2). The latter issue being one 'rarely' addressed in consideration of rural childhood. Although this research, which was centred on children's own accounts of their lives, found that some children

> did appear to be experiencing many of the positive benefits of rural life .... From children and young people on a low income, a very different picture of life in the countryside emerges, with many children expressing feeling of isolation, boredom and a growing conflict with adults (p. 67).

Davis and Ridge also reported that the more positive side of a rural upbringing seemed particularly so for younger children, whereas older, teenage children, regarded their home environment with much more ambivalence and frustration. This ties into more prevalent notions of the countryside being a difficult environment for older children.

3.3.3 Teenage Trouble

Some critical discourses of country childhood idylls are set specifically in terms of the problems older children, or teenagers face. Consequently although strongly critical of the countryside as an environment for the last years of childhood they either overtly or tacitly support ideas of younger country childhood idylls. For example, Roland White (Sunday Times, Style, 12 MAR 1995), scathingly reports on the urban middle-class urge to raise children in the countryside. Couples who have lived in 'stripped pine pot-planted bliss in their inner-city homes' go through some form of change ('perhaps hormonal') when children arrive because -

> the children of the inner-city middle classes have barely made it out of the maternity ward before their parents have decided to move to the country. The city is so polluted, you see, and there's the traffic and the schools to consider and children these days just can't play in the streets any more and they've just got no room to grow and no daughter of mine is growing up without seeing a cow.

Even this satirical attack does not challenge the rural young childhood idyll, for White writes 'for a time, everything goes well. Young children love the countryside, the fresh air fills their lungs, the beauty of the wild flowers delights their innocent eyes' but

> at the age of 13 though the magic seems to disappear....country children begin to yearn for the urban sophistication of MTV, Take That, the first fruits of sexual awakening, and all those other things that you don't get in the village hall on Saturday evening. They get bored...This is why life is far safer and more rewarding for city teenagers than their country counterparts. There is much more to do, much more to see (ibid).

White goes on to present sobering anecdotal evidence of the damaging and destructive behaviour this process of disenchantment can result in, and although he acknowledges that such problems of car crime, under age sex, arson, also occur amongst teenagers in urban areas, it is these problems set in contexts in which they are not acknowledged which is his concern, and he warns - 'there is a dark side to many rural idylls' (ibid).

Avon Community Council in whose area the case study village was (until 1996 local authority reorganisation), has recently covered such issues in it's 'Magazine For Avon's Rural Communities' reporting, 'young people in rural areas are frequently seen as trouble. Yet often their transport needs are not met nor is their natural drive to get out of the house and mix with people their own age' (p. 11, Field Fare, no. 21, summer 1994). This theme has been played upon by publicity for Selfridges of London (fig 3.2) which portrays how the rural village can be dull for young people, and as a result 'it is worth living in London'.

Such issues were also addressed at the national level by a conference 'Meeting the Needs of Young People in Rural Areas' organised by the Trust for the Study of Adolescence, held in Brighton (1 NOV 1995), and also covered in the Rural Development Commission's (RDC) magazine, which reported the findings of an RDC commissioned study, 'The Disadvantages of Young People Living in Rural Areas of Hertfordshire' which 'uncovered widespread dissatisfaction among young people with the limited facilities, difficulties in travelling to social events, and feelings of isolation and boredom' (Ruralfocus, 1994, Vol. 7, 6, summer, p. 4). Important as

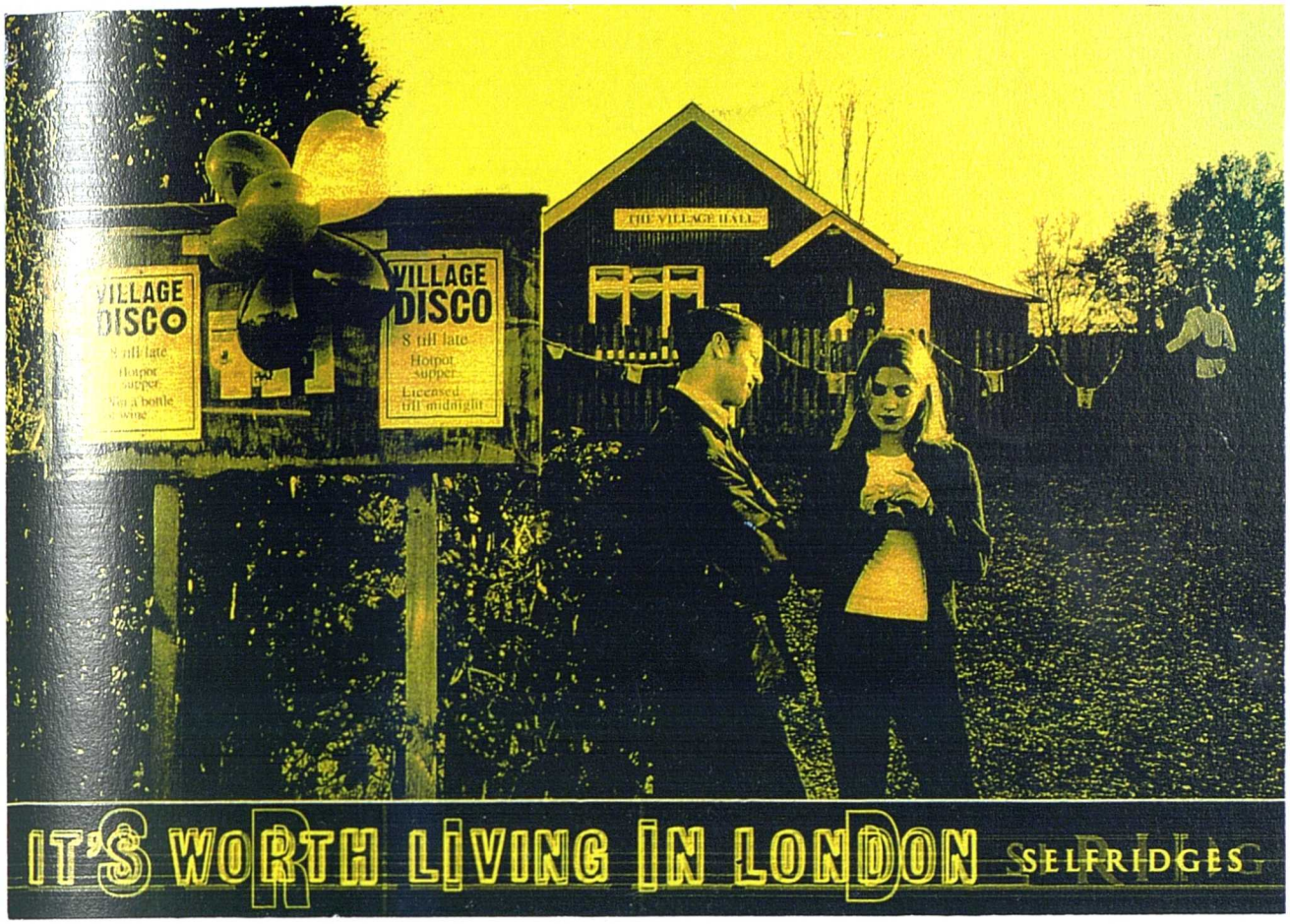


Fig 3.2 The rural as teenage dead zone. 'It is worth living in London'. Selfridges (1996).

such developments are, their repeated specific concentration on the late stages of childhood, seems to reinforce assumptions that the countryside is an idyll for at least the early and middle years of childhood. The move from 'natural' innocent young childhood through adolescence to sophisticated, corrupted 'unnatural' adulthood, ideally corresponds with a move from empathetic 'natural' innocent country environments to sophisticated, corrupted urban environments.

3.3.4 Urban Childhood Idylls?

In some cases critical discourses on rural childhood have gone as far as beginning to see the urban as the more favourable environment for children, thus inverting the main thrust of rural idyll discourses. For example Ryan (1994) in her comparative study of the freedom of movement for children living in rural and in urban settings, concludes, 'the city children have more freedom than their rural counterparts which is not what is suggested by the rural myth' (abstract).

Other challenges to the idea of childhood rural idylls, are motivated not so much by the perceived mismatch between such discourses and the everyday lives of many rural children, but rather by the desire to rehabilitate the urban as a place of possible childhood idyll. This, for example, has been the objective of the author Philip Ridley who was asked by Michael Rosen of the BBC Radio 4 Children's Book Programme 'Treasure Islands' - 'Now all your books have this inner urban, city, devastated, um, ('yup' , from Ridley) deprived setting. The children live in slums or in decay or absolute wastelands. Why's that significant for you?' -

> Well, it was where I grew up. I grew up in the, er, in the East End of London in Bethnal Green, where I still live now, but I think there is another agenda going on as well which I'm very interested in, which is, um, I think, you know, children grow up with this thing rammed into them that if they live in that kind of environment they're living in somewhere they shouldn't be living.[3] Um, somewhere that is dark, somewhere that is dismal, somewhere that there is no hope, no prospects; and what I'm trying to do in a way....is to create this landscape where, you know, one can reinvent that landscape into something magical, into something wonderful, um, a derelict building can become a castle, a dirty old canal can become a magical lake. So it's a way of getting a child to re-see what's around them. Anywhere can be magical, anywhere can have wonder and I think that's what these books are trying to say. (BBC Radio 4, 19 APR 1995).

I think such ideas are very important. I have said in Chapter 1 that I am not out to 'get' the rural as an environment in which to grow up in, I think the case study does throw up many positive things, but I am anxious that the urban (or large tracts of it) should not be seen as an *inevitable* childhood distopia, (and as the next chapter will show it is often portrayed as such), and some of the drive which sets it as so is comparisons with notions of rural idyll. I have already shown how Shoard sees the rural as the best place for children, thus condemning the vast majority who live in urban areas to some form of discourse of inferiority. This is why I suggest discourses of rural childhood idyll have implications beyond rural childhood itself, and in fact impact of childhood in general and especially urban childhoods.

3.4. CHILDHOOD IN CRISIS?

As touched upon in Chapter 2, many aspects of notions of country childhood idylls are in fact sub-sets of more generalised notions of childhood as idyll. For example, the need for children to be outdoors; be with other children; have space to play; have contact with nature. In fact it is this perception of the countryside as the optimum environment for enabling such activities which to a large degree drives notions of idyll. Conversely, there are a number of critical discourses concerning the

[3] Here I take it that the contrast - the places in which children should be living - will be in part if not wholly within rural idylls.

condition of contemporary childhood in general, which implicitly take in rural childhoods within them. Such discourses are those which see childhood as a state of idyll in itself, a psychological or developmental idyll, which is now under threat and/or being eroded by various pressures. These are in some cases generalisations about childhood which cover the same ground as those discourses more specifically about problems with country childhood, and like these they are often built around the loss of the features of childhood which I have already identified as being elements of country childhood idylls, and the most prominent of these are ideas of the end of innocence and the loss of freedom.

3.4.1 End of Innocence

If one of the key defining characteristics of childhood is that of innocence, when that innocence is seen to be lost or challenged then childhood itself is lost, or at least transformed into something else. As considered earlier this construction of innocence is essentially a Romantic view of childhood and in fact humanity. The child, or the person is innocent until corrupted, or at least made experienced, by contact with the (modern) social world. Sibley (1995), reports Winnicott's (1957) assertion that 'the family protects the child from the world', but adds that, 'today, the external world enters the life of many children rather less gradually than it did when Winnicott was writing' (p. 126). Discourses of the end of innocence of children often revolve around this increased contact between childhood and essentially adult external worlds which were in some ways before closed off from childhood. Thus She Magazine's (JUL 1994) cover story and 'Big Issue' -'Have Our Children Lost the Gift of Innocence?' (fig 3.3), is opened by an eight-year old asking 'what's AIDS, Mum?' Similarly The Observer magazine (25 APR 1993) asks on its cover - 'Children of Our Times: The End of Innocence?' (fig 3.4). Here the question is asked on a global scale,

> Today 25,000 children will be born. They face a daunting future. Even in the richest countries, each child soon has to live with a variety of threats: pollution, poverty, war, famine, over-population, terrorism and abuse. Do the traditional images of childhood innocence have any relevance in such a world? (ibid).

In a Sunday Times feature (23 JUN 1996), headlined the 'Death of Innocence' (fig 3.5) the concern was that children now have access to 'adult films depicting sex and brutal murders'. In the same year, the Observer again made the status of childhood its cover story, (fig 3.6) when considering, 'the distressing worldliness of the modern child' (Observer, Life, 7 NOV 1993). The worldliness being that what

THE BIG ISSU

HAVE OUR CHILDREN LOST
the gift of innocence?

What's AIDS, Mum?" asks Zoe, aged eight, one morning over breakfast. Marianne, her mother, curses the radio DJ for choosing this family listening hour to eulogise the late Freddie Mercury. There goes childhood innocence, she sighs wistfully, trashed along with the empty Weetabix packet.

By Madeleine Kingsley

Fig 3.3 'Have Our Children Lost the Gift of Innocence?' (She Magazine, JUL 1994).

replaces innocence when children have experience of, or knowledge of, 'sex or violence or poverty or war or death' through changing parental and educational attitudes and greater access to an ever proliferating media. As a consequence 'little adults' as the feature is titled, replace what were once seen as children.

Humphries, Mack and Perks (1988) also conclude their survey of childhood in the twentieth century, with explorations of the idea of the end of innocence equalling the end of childhood, but do so specifically in the context of sexuality. They argue that the innocence of childhood is chiefly a sexual innocence, and that it is the process of 'sexualization' in terms of interest, knowledge and experience, which is a key threshold in defining maturity, and thus the end of childhood. They support this by showing that 'in the early years of this century, one of the over-riding concerns among both the middle and working classes was to postpone any sexual interest or identity in children' (ibid), even to the point of gender segregation being a common institutional and domestic practice[4]. They then go on the describe a number of

[4] Evidence of this can still be seen in the 'boys' and 'girls' signs above separate entrances still evident on some school buildings.

Fig 3.4 'Children of Our Times: The End of Innocence?' (Observer Magazine 25 APR 1993).

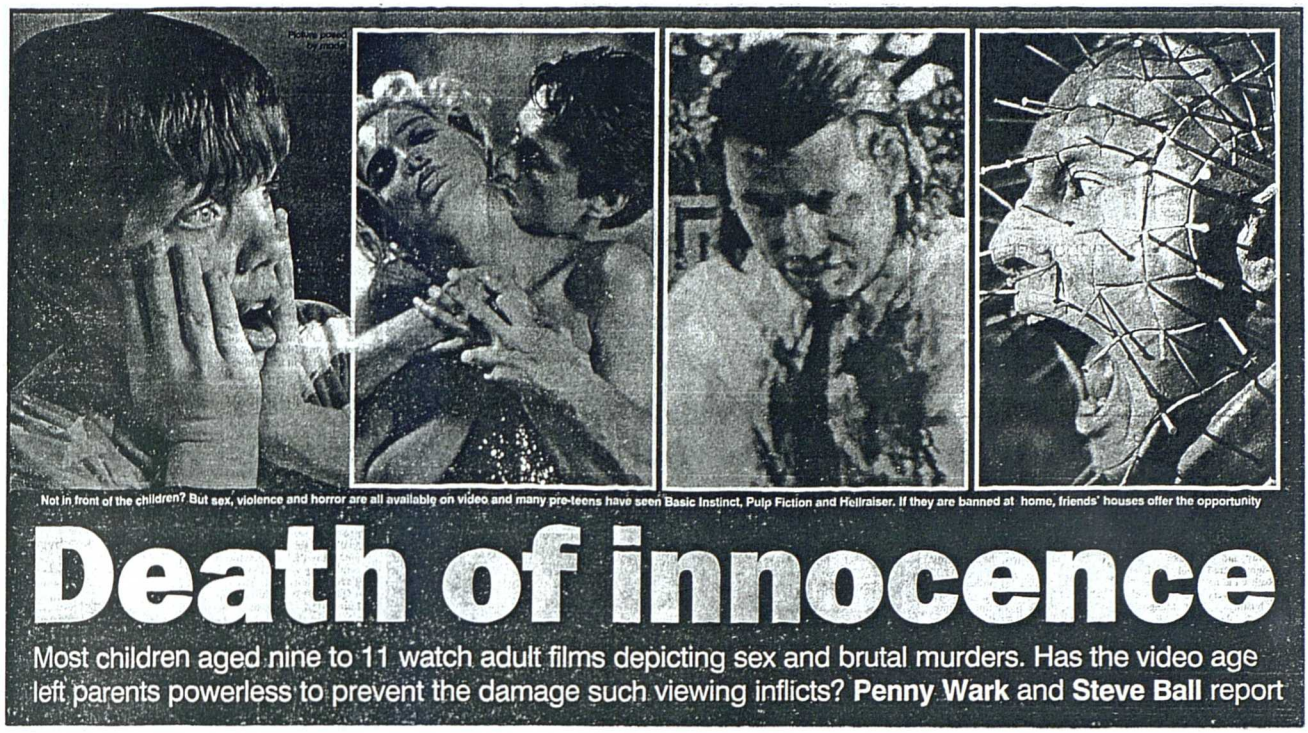


Fig 3.5 The 'Death of Innocence' (Sunday Times, 23 JUN 1996).

processes which has both lowered the age threshold of sexualization and also the sexualization of childhood more generally, and conclude, 'It is above all, this growing sexualization of the world of childhood that has led to fears that we are witnessing the disappearance of childhood' (p. 147).

In the context of such conceptualisations it is by no means certain that such processes will be generalised throughout society and again sensitivity is needed towards how such processes of the sexualization of childhood might be differently constituted through gender, class, ethnicity, and location. The Stainton-Rogers' (1992) claim 'that it is striking just how often that, *for girl-children in particular*, it is the introduction to sexuality which is seen to mark the end of innocence - and hence, the end of childhood' (emphasis added, p. 33). Intriguingly, literature can give glimpses into how ideas of rural idyll and rural childhood idyll may intersect with the process of sexualization, which in some senses challenge the general point made above. In H. E. Bates's *The Darling Buds of May* (famously serialised on television), at the opening of the book, Mariette, Pop's eldest daughter, is seventeen and pregnant. She is not married and uncertain who the father is - 'either that Charles boy who works in the farm...or else that chap who works on the railway

Fig 3.6 'the distressing worldliness of the modern child'. (Observer, Life, 7 NOV 1993).

line'. (1961, p. 8). Such news causes not a ruffle in the idyllic progress of the story. Mariette is still pure, natural, beautiful and innocent. The progress of the Larkin family and her new romance with 'Charley' (not the one possible father) unfolds, and the new baby is absorbed into this idyllic extended family. In this case, although Mariette is leaving, or has left childhood, her innocence is in tact [5] . So in this

[5] 'Pop's' shady deals, tax avoidance, epic alcohol consumption, and extra-marital affairs, are also subsumed by the innocence of the idyll, and it was the portrayal of such which made the 1980's

imagined rural idyll, its powerful state of innocence is not overcome by sexualization, but rather the reverse occurs with sexuality being subsumed into the innocence and naturalness of the rural, thus deflecting the approbation one would have expected in such an era. It is easy to suspect that the idea of innocent sex with voluptuously beautiful young woman in flowery meadows, hay barns, and other such spaces of rural idyll, may well have something to do with the male gender of the author. In Mary Webb's *Gone to Earth*, the intersection of sexuality and the wild innocence of a young country woman leads not to idyll but to tragedy. But even here, Hester the heroine who is destroyed by male passion, remains as natural, innocent and wild as her pet fox, with whom she lives, and eventually dies. It was such visions of natural (therefore innocent) and thus also inevitable sexuality, along with other aspects in the work of Mary Webb and others, which were the chief targets of Stella Gibbon's wonderful parody of 'gothic rural', *Cold Comfort Farm,* in which the 'naturalness' and 'inevitability' of sex and its consequences for women come under Flora Post's critical, practical, ordered, urbane eye. Meriam, 'the hired girl' is in labour, for the forth time, and Flora is told that she is best left alone like an 'animal' and that, "'Every year in the fullness o' summer, when the sukebind hangs heavy from the wains...'tes the same. 'Tes the hand of Nature, and we women cannot escape it." Oh can't we? Thought Flora, with spirit'. (1987, p. 64).

Leaving such considerations of innocence, sexuality and the rural aside for now, my basic point is that there is a prevalent concern that childhood in general, both in national and global terms, is being both eroded and corrupted, through, amongst other things fear and over-ordering, a creeping loss of innocence. Rural childhood idylls are usually not set aside from such concerns, and if the innocence has gone, so has one of the touch stones of notions of rural childhood idylls. But as it will be shown, there may be differing degrees of such concerns, and the rural may be seen *and practised* as a refuge for the innocence of childhood, particularly in comparison with ideas of urban childhoods.

3.4.2 Fear

Fear is perhaps the other major discourse about threats to childhood. To an extent this overlaps with ideas of the end of innocence, for the fear is, in part, of those things which are seen to end innocence. But beyond that there is fear of the loss or

---

television adaptations politically controversial as well as hugely popular.

violation of the child itself through some form of personal violence. The nub of this is that increasing parental fear, and of children themselves, leads to the increasing of imposed or voluntary curfews and surveillance routines. This does not so much end childhood, but rather strips away many of what are seen as the key positive features of childhood. As emphasised in chapter 2, many features of a childhood idyll; being outdoors, being with other children, being away from adult authority, having separate, secret places to go to and explore and play in, depend on a quite high degree of spatial and personal freedom - fear is being seen to be increasingly restricting such freedom. As Heather Welford reported, referring to a survey conducted by the Policy Studies Institute, 'parents today have to assume the world is a hostile and dangerous. As a result, children are far less independent and less mobile than they were a generation ago' (Guardian, 7 JUN 1994).

Such concerns were graphically highlighted in 1995 when on one weekend, three children were murdered. In one case, two boys, Robbie Gee age 12, and Paul Barker age 13, were murdered while on a fishing trip; in the other a seven year old girl, Sophia Louise Hook, was taken from a tent in her uncle's garden where she was sleeping along with and elder sister and cousin. She was 'sexually assaulted and strangled' and her body dumped on a nearby beach. The events dominated the media for some days and sparked not only debate about the specific cases but also wider consideration of the dangers children face and the current status of childhood. The outdoor element of these events were, understandably, key to how they were reported. The children were on holiday, enjoying outdoor childhoods, free from close adult supervision. One of the consequences of these killings according to Linda Grant is that 'every child in Britain lost a bit more freedom' (Weekend Guardian, 6 JAN 1996). Not only are children being killed but so is childhood itself, is the common conclusion. Such a peak of media attention and such conclusions echo those surrounding previous child murder cases, most notoriously the 'moors murders' and the Jamie Bulger case (in which children were also the killers), but although the media attention dies down and the sharpness of the fear felt is blunted by time, there is a perception that residues of fear remain and have accumulated to the point of creating a kind of childhood siege mentality. Grant (ibid) interviewed 10 children (aged 12 - 13) about their lifestyles and concluded that

> today's pre-pubescents possess some of the most sophisticated skills as consumers in the country. but they have less personal freedom than any previous generation - trapped at home by their parents' fear of violence on the streets and in the playgrounds.

This is the irony of 'the fearful world of kids today' (fig 3.7).The perceived, and sometimes feared, increase in sophistication and capabilities they possess, has developed hand in hand with a reduction in the personal freedom through which such attributes might be best expressed.

Katy Green (1995) goes as far as saying that 'we have begun to persuade ourselves that it is wrong to see children playing outside. We keep children in, at who knows what cost to their development' (p. 75). Recognising this, and trying to negotiate the ultra sensitive problems of countering it, organisations such as Kidscape point out that terrible as such cases are, they are still extremely rare - many more children are killed or attacked in some way within domestic or acquaintance contexts. Kidscape's purpose in doing so is derived from their perceptions of the importance of freedom and access to the outdoors for children, and their concern that the increased restriction in freedom is hugely disproportionate to the chances of fears of danger being realised. This is also the message being pushed by Families Need Freedom. As reported by Barry Hugill (Guardian, 14 JUL 1996) this group emerged after the murder of school children at Dunblane, and consists mainly of mothers who are concerned that prevailing attitudes and policies surrounding childhood are being dominantly formed in the context of appalling, but still extremely rare incidents such as Dunblane. The loss of freedom that is resulting from this is their main concern, and they have assembled an 'anti-safety pack' which is intended to counter the growing volume of child safety discourse and practice, which inevitably involves restricted spatial/temporal/social freedom for children[6].

TRAFFIC AND OTHER FEARS

Of course, murder or molestation are not the only fears that parents have; fear of traffic and fear of contact with drugs, solvent abuse, aids and crime are also very prominent (McNeish and Roberts, 1995). Although such fears, as will be shown in, are often seen as mainly urban problems, again they are often discussed in terms of childhood in general, and such fears do penetrate into the rural, and, as it will be shown, into the case study village. This penetration takes two forms, in that these

[6] Another example of groups in some ways countering the restriction on childhood mobility is the cycle routes campaign group Sustrans who have launched a 'Safe Routes to Schools Project' which provides information (Sustrans, 1996) to those wishing to (re)establish safe cycling to school for children, but this is concentrated on reducing dangers from traffic on established school routes.

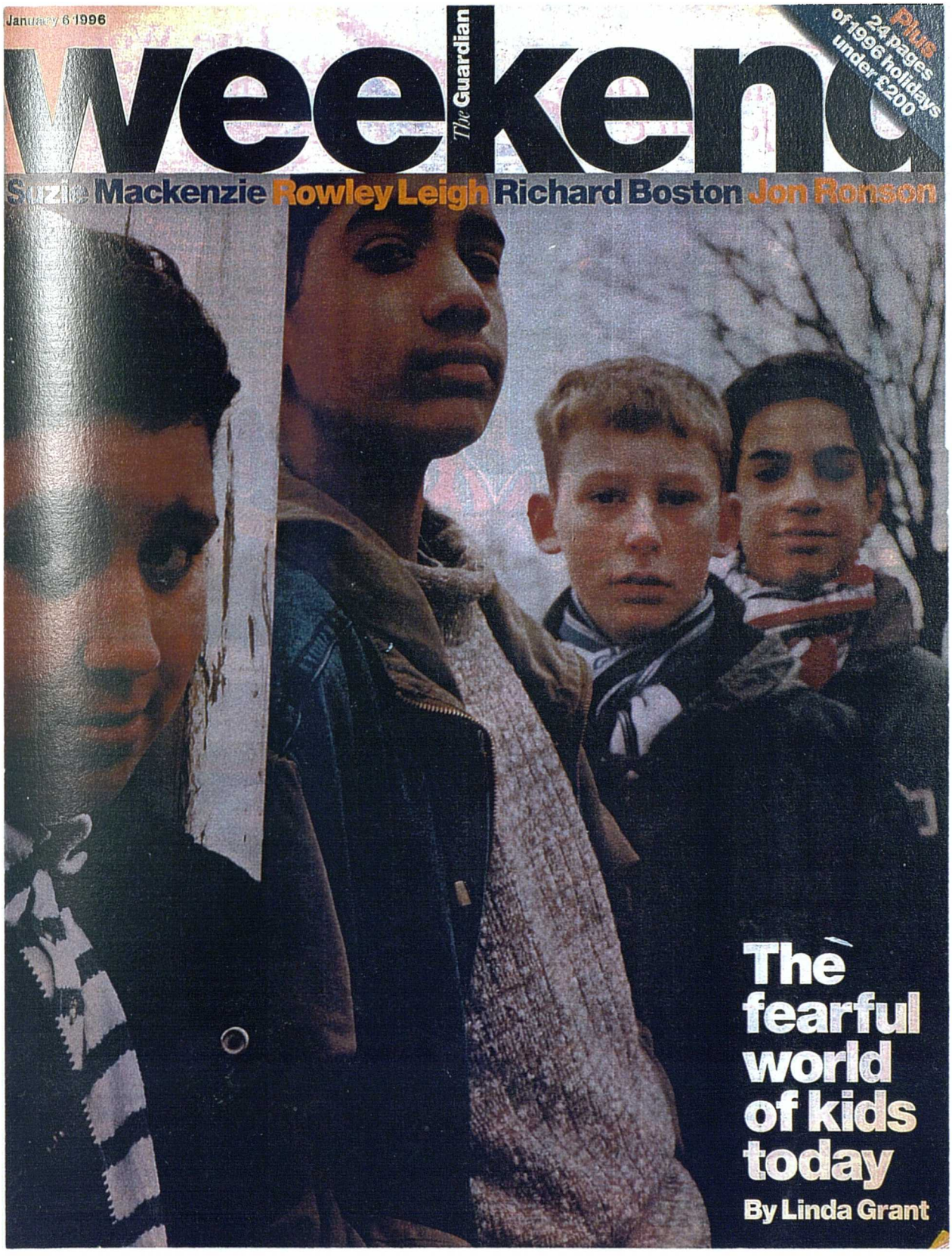


Fig 3.7 'The fearful world of kids today'. (Cover, Guardian, Weekend, 06 JAN 1996).

fears are seen as risks in rural areas, but such areas also remain as places of refuge against such risks. Cars and traffic play a major part within all this. Not only is the car often seen as the child asaulter's/abductor's tool, and thus through mobility affecting all spaces, but traffic, in the danger it poses to children, has also become a key issue in terms of concerns for childhood and children's freedom and pedestrian mobility. Such concerns are part of the agenda of the Reclaim the Streets movement of which children are both campaigning and reporting icons, and are also reflected in the increased efforts being put into traffic calming schemes (Green, 1995).

Another important point to be made is that it is not just parental fear which keeps children indoors. Children also have fears themselves. Clearly these are bound up with, and often negotiated with parents and adults, but children also have the ability to 'read danger signals' coming to them through the media, their peer groups and direct experience. An article by Diane Summers (Financial Times, 25 MAY 1995) summarising a report on the attitudes and behaviour of children aged 7 - 12, was headlined 'conformity and fear rule' and, 'a modern child's home appears to be its refuge'. The survey compared the attitudes of a sample of 2000 children with those revealed by a similar survey done 20 years previously. Amongst the findings, it was concluded that 'children's bedrooms have replaced the street as the popular place to play as fear of crimes drives children indoors and parents are prepared to buy them their own televisions, video games and music systems'. For the modern children the most prominent fears were of 'bombs', 'guns', 'bullying', 'crime' and 'child abduction'. While these fears are similar to those felt by parents for their children, children have others sets of fears also. This was considered by Martin Wainwright (Guardian, 31 JUL 1996)

> While parents increasingly fear for the safety of their children in the wake of events like Dunblane, the recent machete attack in a Wolverhampton school...Their offspring are scared stiff too. but not about the weekly cruelties of the real-life news. Curtains, socks and the weird shadow on the bedroom wall in the orange glow of a street lamp are the stuff of pre-teen horror.

In many of these cases there is little attempt to consciously spatialize these discourses, although the report talked of the bedroom replacing *the street*, an urban childhood icon, it is 'every child' which is effected, those living in rural areas as well. And in the case of the two boys murdered on a fishing trip, while it did not take place in a rural location, it was in an urban fringe 'beauty spot' and seen as the countryside. Thus not only is the rural implicitly drawn into such discourses of fear,

but through notions of woods, the countryside as a place of solitude and thus risk, and the outdoors in general being sites of danger, it is more explicitly drawn in [7]. This was vividly expressed by Blake Morrison when writing about fears for children, and how this had penetrated even the most idyllic (country) sites of childhood. He argued that the fear of losing children -as mythologised in the story of Pied Piper of Hamlin - has become 'a peculiarly late 20th-century phenomenon', (and) -

> It's all some parents think about...it can creep up on you, like a shadow, darkening an innocent moment.
>
> It crept up on me a few evenings ago, in a harvest field. Two of my children and their friends had been playing a game with straw bales: the modern, cylindrical bale ... is easy to push, and the game was to role the bale while someone tried to kneel or stand on top of it. Afterwards we headed back to the house over another stubbly field, where the children re-ran the Olympic 110 metres hurdles over straw that was still lying ungathered in long rows.
>
> It was a perfect evening: the moon coming up, an owl hooting, wisps of mist over the stubble. But gradually, worryingly, the children slipped from view. The youngest was wearing a white T-shirt, and seemed to go under, lost behind the waves of straw. The was no need to worry; the house was close by; we were alone in the middle of a cornfield; it wasn't as if there were cars about, or dangerous animals, or paedophiles, or murderers. There was no need to worry but I did worry, and wasn't happy again until I found the children safely back in the house.
>
> It's been the summer of lost children...[8] (The Guardian: The Week section, 7 SEP 1996)

3.4.3 Over Ordering (Space and Time)

In this final section considering perceived threats to childhood as idyll, I want to consider notions of over ordering, the imposing of rigid regimes in some form or other on children which are seen the stifle their freedom of movement both in physical, creative and spiritual terms. Again these are often set in general childhood terms, but for notions of rural childhood idyll they are closely bound to issues of 'other' space and access to it discussed in chapter 2. I want to briefly consider two frameworks of ordering - spatial, in which the spaces and processes of childhood are literally tided away; and temporal, in which children do not have the free time to access such spaces. These are in practice closely enmeshed and are often bound by processes of disciplinary ordering which has both spatial and temporal outcomes, but to separate space and time out does provide some purchase on these issues.

---

[7] Both Burgess (1993a, 1993b) and Valentine (1990) have conducted research into reactions to woodland and other open spaces, and how fear is a major element, particularly in terms of women's concern about violent sexual crime.

[8] I have already shown how 1995 was a year when a number of high-profile child murder cases received wide attention and prompted general considerations of the state of childhood. Here Morrison's 'summer of lost children' is 1996 and was prompted by amongst others the case of Jodi and Tom Loughlin who disappeared from a Norfolk beach, and also the disclosure of extensive child sexual abuse and murder in Belgium. This is indicative that this perception of childhood crisis is proving persistent rather than transitory.

SPATIAL OVER ORDERING

Spatial over-ordering and its consequences for rural childhood as expressed by Ward and Shoard, is also a concern expressed of childhood more generally, and in fact of society generally, particularly from anarchist perspectives, but also from other quarters concerned over the ideological hostility to various forms of otherness which can be enshrined in such ordering. Such concerns have driven the work of Sibley, and he has on a number of occasions addressed issues of order and children, (1981, 1988, 1995). These issues become major themes in the second part of the dissertation and so are only briefly introduced here, but the concern over the tidying up of the countryside at the expense of childhood spaces, cannot be seen simply in terms of the changes processes of land use, but have to be connected into wider ideological intolerance for the untidiness of not only 'other' forms of spaces, but also the untidiness of childhood itself, and other groups which may not conform to dominant patterns of behaviour.

TEMPORAL OVER ORDERING

Concerns over temporal over-ordering can be illustrated by an article by Brenda Houghton (Independent on Sunday 27 FEB 1994). Here she claims that 'It is pretty exhausting being a child nowadays. Not for them the freedom to run wild that William Brown and his friends had' (note that it is an imaginary text of rural childhood idyll which is held up as the ideal). Houghton concedes that this is in part due to perceptions of danger, but also she feels 'spontaneity is being squeezed out of children's lives by more than simply the need of adult protection. Children increasingly find that their free time is full of organised activities'. This she suggests is due to a number of factors ranging from parental desire for children to achieve; changing household structures which means parents are out working for longer hours and children have to be organised in the meantime; and increasing numbers of courses and activities which respond to these markets. Gerison Landsdowne, Director of the Children's Rights Development Unit supports such concerns stating 'I grew up in the Fifties and a lot of my play was with other children with no supervision for hours on end. The loss of freedom and autonomy has been substituted for by higher levels of out-of-school, adult focused activities and by consumer goods.' (Cited by Grant, Weekend Guardian, 06 JAN 1996) This over-ordering leaves less room for children to be 'just mucking about with friends' or 'day-

dreaming' or in fact doing the things which are seen to make up childhood. Ironically in some instances it is attempts at recreating the rural childhood idyll which become themselves part of this process of over ordering -

> For many parents, the unfettered fictional childhoods depicted in *Swallows and Amazons* or even the *Famous Five* stories remain a powerful influence. Lisa Jardine, Professor of English at Queen Mary College, London and mother of three, believes that for a long time to come "the romance of free play in the open air" will drive parents to try to supply some semblance of it for their children (Houghton, ibid).

McNeish and Roberts (1995) point out that within processes of what I am calling the temporal over-ordering of childhood, there is a sharp distinction between families of differing income levels.

> Parents with the resources to do so spend increasing amounts of time structuring their children's leisure., ferrying them from one organised activity to the next. Parents with fewer resources may be left with the choice of allowing their children freedom (at the cost of parental anxiety) or keeping them under close supervision (and facing long days with bored children) (p. 3).

The consequence of this, and other fears which I have considered above, is according to McNeish and Roberts, that 'Children today are living in an increasingly restrictive environment' (p. 3), and the sum up this with a quote taken from The Times, (05 AUG 1995) - 'These days our children are not so much free-range as battery-reared' (ibid).

3.5 'LITTLE ANGELS, LITTLE DEVILS', DECONSTRUCTING MODERN CHILDHOOD

This final section of this chapter is intended to introduce emerging discourses which are critical and/or questioning of the whole concept of childhood. These differ from those which have argued that childhood is under some sort of threat, for they challenge the very nature of childhood as some form of natural or 'universal' state. This at once poses considerable challenges to this and other work on children, but also opens up possibilities for considering country childhood idylls as the ideal forum - and possible last stronghold - of certain dominating constructions of what childhood is.

Childhood as a natural state has come increasingly under critical scrutiny over the last few decades. Within this movement Philippe Aries' (1962) *Centuries of Childhood* is an oft cited and pivotal moment. His basic argument is that childhood as perceived in modern western societies did not exist in medieval society, where as soon as a child was weaned, (around the age of 3 - 5 years) they became 'participating members of adult society', (Suransky, 1982). Childhood, as opposed

to the state of infancy, only began to emerge as a bourgeois creation of post-feudal Europe (See also Liljeststrom, 1980), and 'came of age' in the nineteenth century, and provided us with the cultural legacies (which we now fear losing) of today. In these contexts Suransky (1982) asks, 'if the very idea of childhood itself is a myth, what of the vast and voluminous body of theories' (p. 3), which abound in matters of child development, and education. The same has to be asked In the context of this work about notions of country childhood idylls. As the perceived crisis in childhood grows - Jo-Ann Wallace considers the present to be a 'moment of massive anxiety in the West about the capacities, the safety, and the status of children' (1995, p. 286) - such ideas are spreading from their previously specialised settings, and are beginning to penetrate other academic settings and also appearing at the academic/popular interface in what is known as 'serious' television and print media manifestations. The opening quotes from one such, captures the thrust of such discourses.

> We have pinned onto children as individuals, children as persons, a whole enormous philosophical edifice, about something called childhood, which is not at all what the condition of children is.
>
> Adults create children, they invent them, children don't invent themselves, adults tell children stories about what it is to be a child.
>
> Childhood is a projection of what adults fear and hope and desperately want, not even really for their children, but for all the things they would like to still be, or to have been.
>
> We've still got a romantic view of childhood deeply embedded in our society, long after its sell-by date. By the end of the twentieth century I think that the ideal is beginning to collapse, it's going to be impossible to sustain any longer the idea that childhood should be like that. (BBC 2, Late Show. 'The End of Childhood?' Written and Produced by Sarah Dunant, 5 DEC 1994).

Warner (1994) feels the crux of such adult constructions of childhood, is the image of 'little angels' where adultness, in yearning for its idealised self, sees it in - takes hope from - children as 'warrants of virtue, as markers of humanity'. Here the innocence of children is critical, but this 'present cult' also draws upon,

> children's intimate connection.. to a wonderful, free-floating world of the imagination. Their observable, active fantasy life, their fluid make-believe play seems to give them access to a world of wisdom, and in turn this brings them close to myth and fairy-tale (p. 37).

A necessary consequence of such views of childhood is its clear demarcation from the worlds of adults, a demarcation which Warner suggests is enshrined by increasing numbers of child centred discourses, which range from legal, through academic and welfare structures to commercial marketing. This is an institutional continuation of the processes of the production of childhood as highlighted by Aries,

which, paradoxically runs alongside concern about the break down of the child-world/adult-world divide, as considered in the section on the end of innocence.

Warner goes on to argue that if children contravene this impossible status put upon them, they are in some way polluting the pool of goodness that is seen as lying at the heart of humanity, they rupture the emotional and psychological investment made in them by adultness and thus, from 'little angels' they become 'little devils'. Warner charts how this view of childhood has grown up as counter point to the ideas of innocence, and I will argue in the next chapter that the 'little devils' are often urban children, particularly the 'feral children' of the 'problem inner city estates' which are of such fascination to the national media.

I have already considered in section 3.2.5 how some critics see children's literature as being more about adulthood than childhood. Now the possibility arises that childhood itself is some form of adult fiction. This is not to deny that 'children' are somehow different from adults. Clearly, being biologically young, brings both physiological and psychological differences; size and stocks of knowledge (Thrift, 1985) being just two corresponding examples. But such differences or otherness of children may be subsumed or overshadowed by constructions of childhood of which country childhoods may be a particularly powerful form. I have suggested that many of the elements contained in notions of country childhood idylls, such as innocence, nature, outdoors, freedom, and adventure, are in fact congruent with visions of ideal childhood more generally, and that it was/is the countryside which offers the greatest scope for these to be 'realised'. In this case notions of country childhood may be a form of adult construction of childhood which has had the space to develop to some sort of conclusion, thus the notion of idyll. As it will be shown, in other settings, most notably the urban, but also the developing, and 'third' world, adult constructions of childhood are brought up short by images which they cannot ignore or subsume, thus leaving the (developed world's) countryside as the place where adult constructions of childhood can still flourish. This idea could be seen as a spatialization of Warner's (1994) assertion that 'although the cultural and social investment in childhood innocence is constantly tested by experience, and assailed by doubts, it continues to grow' (p. 45).

In the theoretical frameworks of constructions of childhood, Jo-Ann Wallace (1995) sets out to 'outline the possibilities for what we might call a future theory of the child-subject" (p.285), for she sees that, 'the category of the "child", a foundational product of the modern episteme, remains an unacknowledged and therefore unexamined organising principle - *not only* of the modern nation state... but *also* of what we might call..."oppositional" theory' (p. 286). The latter she feels has been blind to the category of 'the child' and that not only should poststructuralist theories, particularly Foucault's technologies of subjectivity, be brought to bear on notions of childhood, but also that notions of childhood should be brought to bear on such theories. Wallace concedes that these issues are very substantial both in complexity and scope, and in this context I do not feel I can become too enmeshed in them. But my first tentative conclusion that emerges is that Philo's (1992) simple binary model of considering how (rural) children's worlds are 'structured from without and experienced from within' - the genesis of this project and its basic form - begins to look over-neat. I still feel there is much usefulness in such an approach, and it is easy to think of many examples where children's experience of things 'from within' is clearly different to - contesting or subverting - the structures in which they live their lives. But there must be a question about the experiencing from within itself having degrees of structuring, thus rendering a simple binary module much more complex. Such issues need exploring in the contexts of how the mapping and boundaries children encounter (Pile and Thrift, 1995, p. 56) structures the subject which then does the experiencing.

To conclude this chapter, I have tried to show how powerful yet complex cultural constructions of the countryside as a childhood idyll, are in fact implicitly or explicitly countered by a number of critical discourses which relate to the countryside, particularly as an idyll, and also childhood as an idyll, and in certain specific instances, the notion of country childhood idyll itself. But these critical discourses are fragmentary both in qualitative and quantitative terms, and do not add up to an overall counter-discourse of the same scale or force as idyll discourses. They need to be heeded for they may be already opening up glimpses of other country childhoods, and are in some cases related to attitudes which in terms of state or not state action, will have direct implications for the delivery of child welfare policies in rural areas.

CHAPTER 4

BUT....URBAN DISTOPIA - RURAL UTOPIA: DISCOURSES OF NEGATIVE ENHANCEMENT

I now switch the focus of my attention to the urban, and in particular to a distinct set of discourses which consider childhood in urban environments from a number of angles, but which share a common thrust centring around the idea that the (contemporary) urban, or certain sectors of it, can be seen as a form of childhood distopia. In some cases these directly refer to the rural as the idyll which is the opposite to such distopias, but in many others cases the persistent concentration on the problems of urban childhood also fuel constructions of the rural as idyll by it being an 'absent other' behind such constructions of urban childhood. These then have the consequence of reinforcing notions of country childhood idyll, and to a limited extent, notions of past childhood idyll.

A number of commentators, for example Lowe, Murdoch and Cox (1995), Murdoch and Pratt, (1993), Game (1991), James (1991), Mormont (1990), have stressed the importance of seeing the rural not in some form of analytical isolation but rather as intricately bound up with the urban, and how both 'complexly contribute to the construction of each others form' (Jones, 1997). I feel this is particularly so in the context of this work, and that it would leave a large gap in trying to grasp how children in the countryside are seen, and their worlds structured, if no reference was paid to the cross-currents of discourses which flow between these two basic cultural configurations. As it will be shown in Chapter 7 comparative structuring does emerge strongly in the case study analysis.

To introduce these complex and subtle cross currents of positive and critical discourses which flow around notions of the rural and the urban as childhood environments, I will briefly summarise the position I am taking. Firstly it seems clear that there are powerful strands of rural idyll discourses running through our culture(s), and within and/or besides these, strong notions of the countryside being in some ways an idyllic setting for childhood. Running counter to these, and partly prompted by them, are various critical discourses which challenge, or at least question, ideas of rural idyll and rural childhood idyll. These are often quite

specialist in nature, being academic and/or emanating from state or non state funded institutions and programmes concerned with some aspect of children's rights or welfare. Beyond these there are discourses which are critical of the contemporary condition of childhood in general, seeing it as in a state of crisis, or being 'eroded'. The latter, I feel probably do more to challenge ideas of rural childhood idylls than the specialist critical discourses, for they are more in evidence in the media and other vehicles of popular discourses - especially in the contexts of a number of high-profile child murder cases, child crime and violence, child abuse, and problems within education. But these counters to rural childhood idylls, and that of the specialist discourses, are mostly overwhelmed by the very strong emphasis put on urban crisis and urban childhood crisis. *As will be shown many depictions of urban crisis contain children, and many supposedly generalised expressions of concern for childhood are actually set in urban contexts.* Although this is in some ways obvious considering the vast majority of children live in urban or at least suburban settings, it does have the effect of reinforcing notions of childhood idylls. Thus rural childhood idyll is maintained as being a 'relative to urban' idyll. In the light of this it might be fair to say that *the countryside is becoming the last refuge of notions of childhood as idyll,* and thus now bears more emotional and nostalgic investment from within adulthood than ever before.

4.1 DREAMS IN PASTORAL SHADES: RURAL URBAN COMPARISONS

There is a steady beat of reports in the media, (national news papers, magazines, and terrestrial television current affairs programmes) which detail the ongoing perceptions of the rural as being seen as a favourable environment in which to live when compared to the urban. These reports, often promoted by and drawing upon survey results, chart not only the population drift from the urban to the rural in processes of counter-urbanisation, but also the underlying dream of 'living in the country' of many others who never become part of this process.

The Daily Mail (31 MAY 1994) - drawing on a work[1] which used 1991 census data to show which areas in Britain were growing in population terms and which were shrinking - headlined a feature 'Escape From The City' and opened the article - 'families are deserting the cities in their droves for a new life style in the

[1] This was produced by CACI International (London), who have informed me that there is no reference for the work other than the article.

countryside', and illustrated the story with a map showing the top ten fastest growing and shrinking areas in population terms. Taking the examples of the top of each category - Liverpool shrinking, Chiltern growing - they presented these 'two faces of changing Britain', where Liverpool is a scene of 'a forest of for let and for sale signs,...unemployment, decay, dereliction, vandalism, and graffiti'; while the village of Chalfont St Giles, and others like it in Chiltern, enjoy 'popular prosperity' and are, 'havens from the rat race', because 'given the opportunity most people would like to be surrounded by green fields, clean air and beautiful landscapes'.

This message that the rural is seen as better living environment is repeated in many similar reports , for example; the Telegraph Magazine - 'Seven out of ten Britons dream of living in the country' (27 FEB 1993); She Magazine - 'The "rural dream" remains as strong as ever, according to a survey by the Henley Centre for Forecasting: 48% of people interviewed said they would like to live in the country' (AUG 1995). Such discourses not only reflect but constitute such constructions and are at the heart of migration from urban to rural environments, a point which has been neglected in the analysis of such. Halfacree (1994), from his survey of literature on counterurbanization concludes that it has 'has failed to appreciate adequately the extent to which a desire to live in a more rural residential environment is a crucial constitutive element of this migration phenomenon' (p. 185).

This desire to live in the countryside is undoubtedly fuelled by a complex amalgam of many elements which combine in differing configurations, according to differing personal, spatial and temporal circumstances. Some of these issues are explored by John Naughton (Life, 07 AUG 1996) when he asked in the face of the evidence of counterurbanization - 'Britain's cities may be dysfunctional planning disasters. But is that any reason to move to the country?' Naughton quotes from the report *Quality of Life in Cities* carried out by London University and the British Library, that

> many people put a far greater value on natural rather than constructed environments. They associate cities with enforced sensory deprivation in which experience of the "real" world is denied them. They cannot see the horizon, smell fresh air, or mark the changes of the seasons; their daily lives are spent in artificially lit and artificially ventilated buildings, and they cannot stand back from the cluttered urban world and see it in context.

This seems to reflect an aesthetic subordination of the urban, and the resulting spin off, both in the physical management of the urban, and the valuing of it, leads to

the more 'mundane', (as Naughton puts it), complaints about British cities, where people 'find them polluted, noisy, dangerous, expensive and hard to live in. They worry about poor and overstretched schools, eroded health services, traffic and parking, inadequate public transport, and the daily slog of commuting'. Another report which the article draws upon, *Local Futures* by the Henley Centre, confirms that health care, crime, and education seemed to be the dominant worries amongst these, which in effect were 'stunting London's economic prosperity' by deterring new investment and causing what could be termed a 'professional drain'. Ironically some of these worries are precisely those which occur in discourses which question the rural idyll, and within these, public transport, stands out as an issue where some rural areas have suffered to the extent of the almost complete withdrawal of public transport networks.

Such aesthetic and more immediate quality of life issues are inevitably bound up with the differing 'cultural status' the rural and the urban are accorded. Lowe, Murdoch and Cox (1995) suggest that the 'countryside stands at the heart of British "national" identity, whereas the 'urban' sits quite uneasily with dominant notions of Britishness'[2]. In this counterpoint with the rural, Britain's urbanism becomes 'abject' (ibid). Cloke and Milbourne (1992) call for greater analysis of constructions of rural idyll because of the impact these may have in shaping rural spaces. It seems clear that this call needs to be extended to incorporate the implications notions of rural idyll have for urban, and suburban spaces also. There may be a case for suspecting that the urban is aesthetically, spiritually, and materially neglected in favour of heavy investment of such in the rural. Notions of country childhood idylls are inevitably bound up with such cultural orientations, and as it will be shown, this is reinforced by a persistent set of associations which link childhood crisis and urban crisis.

4.2 SMALL ICONS OF SOCIAL ENTROPY: THE USE OF CHILDHOOD IN URBAN CRISIS IMAGERY

Apart from the above discourses of urban/rural comparisons there is a massive suite of discourses on urban crisis itself, which centre around concerns over

[2] This is an issue which has been explored on a number of occasions, for example, Short (1992), Williams (1985).

violence, drugs, (other) crime, economic malaise, unemployment, traffic chaos, inner-city decay, family breakdown, educational breakdown, environmental degradation and so on. Often, as we are a predominately urban society, such crises are talked of as affecting society in general, and often children are used as emotive icons with which to illustrate these stories.

In a major article in the Independent on Sunday (17 APR 1994), 40 estates and urban districts were listed and mapped as places with fearful reputations, which amounted to 'No-Go Britain' where non-locals, public sector workers, the emergency services, police, doctors, and 'even postmen and milkmen think twice before going unescorted'. These places, ***all*** set in urban, or metropolitan areas, are places where 'fear rules' and which share 'higher than average unemployment, low home ownership, and a high percentage of young males with time on their hands. Many are plagued by drugs, delinquency and violence, and some have seen violent clashes with the police'. This story is illustrated by a dark grainy photograph of an housing estate, with two figures, one certainly a young girl, slipping across a deserted road (fig 4.1).

FEAR RULES IN

HORROR of CITYS.

A report on the parts of the country most people would rather not think about — never mind live

The Moulescoomb Estate, Brighton: all over the country there are areas where police, doctors, even postmen and milkmen, think twice before going unescorted

Fig 4.1 Children within the iconography of urban malaise. (Independent on Sunday, 17 APR 1994).

As other images will show such iconography of grainy, dark-skied, dramatically lit photographs, often taken with a wide lens to distort perspective, is common in images of urban/childhood crisis.

In a major cover feature, The Weekend Guardian, (1 JUL 1995) described an enclave of Edwardian terraces in Newcastle as 'Little Beirut' in an attempt get across the level of societal dysfunctionality reached. This article describes the area as a place where crime, violence, hatred, economic and material collapse dominates; traditional policing has collapsed; and private landlords profit. Within the article children are used as vivid illustrations both in image and text. The main photograph, along side the headline, shows two boys (probably under ten years of age), playing on a burnt out car in a rubbish strewn yard with boarded up windows behind (fig 4.2), and the text reports, '(this) is a neighbourhood where respectable grown-ups run away from home in the middle of the night, where residents watch men kick in front doors and spirit pale, crew-cut children inside to open the way for the burglars'.

In an another example, The Daily Mail (27 OCT 1993) reported a speech by Prince Charles in which he addressed problems of such inner-city areas and 'run-down housing estates' in terms of 'a spiral of despair and alienation that generated racial tension, crime, drug abuse and unemployment' which amounted to a 'lethal cocktails of problems for society'. In the report emphasis was given to the speech's comments on children within this general picture of gloom, and which described 'the lawlessness of inner city children "as the Lord of the Flies syndrome" - where youngsters set up their own social order with frightening consequences'.

It is perhaps inevitable - given the status of children as innocent, as in need of special care, and as society's investment in the future - that considerations of urban crisis such as these, will use children as a focus to grab attention and generate concern. The children are the emotional trump card to be played when discussing these crises in sectors of society. Thus an association between children and such scenarios is established, and this is then reinforced by other forms of association and more direct concerns for children living in urban environments.

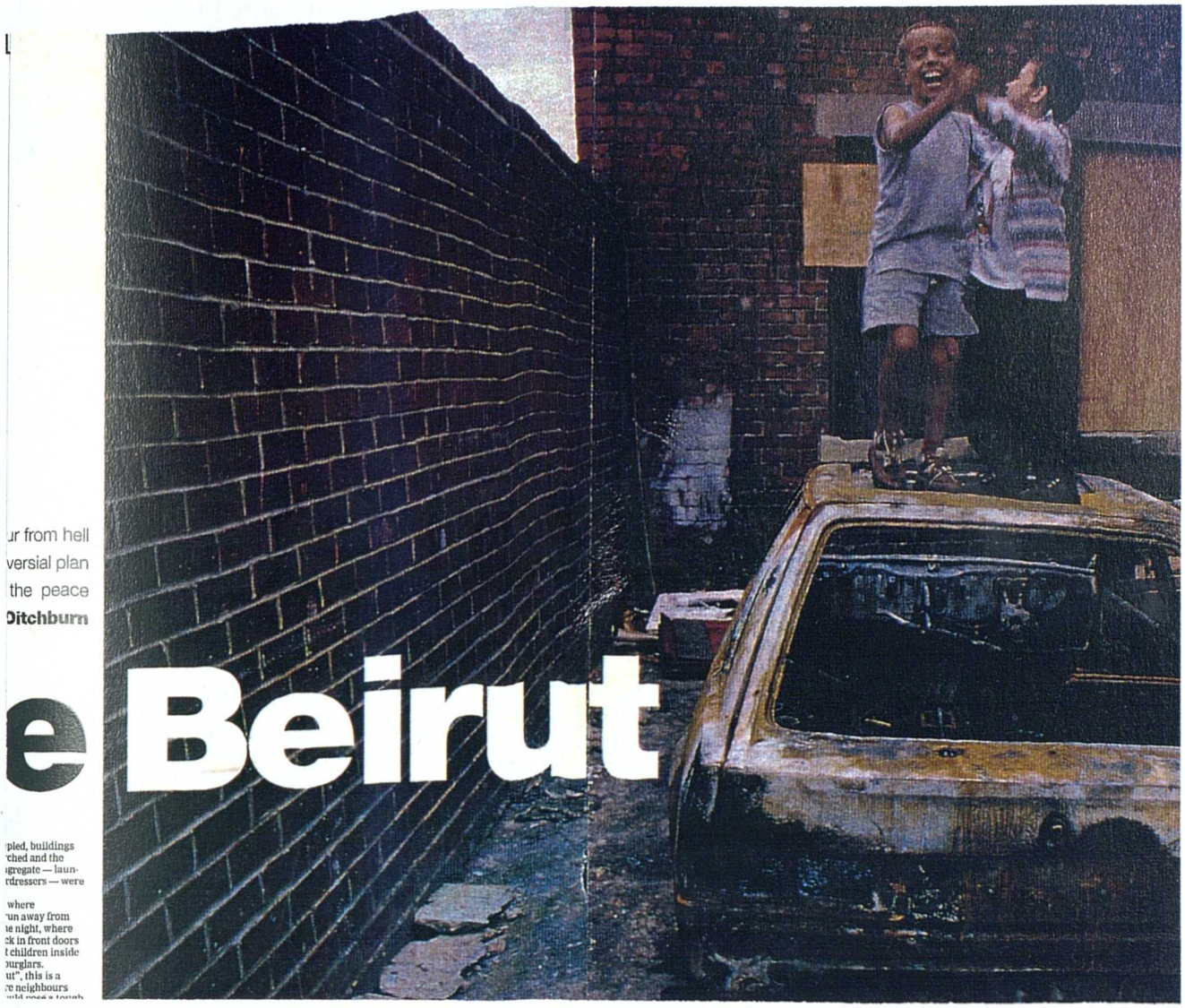


Fig 4.2 Wild children as symbols of social entropy. (The Weekend Guardian, 1 JUL 1995)

4.3 URBAN BIAS IN IMAGES OF CHILDHOOD CRISIS

As well as the use of children to illustrate urban crises, the urban is used to illustrated childhood crises, and thus the link between the two is constantly reconfirmed and developed. Often discourses which are addressing some or other aspect of childhood crisis, although *in principle* talk about childhood in general, without distinguishing between the rural and the urban, in fact illustrate their arguments with *urban* images because it is these which seem to portray problems most starkly, and which tap into the most readily accessible seams of public perception. For example the children's welfare charity Barnados, in their work on poverty and the effects it has on children's lives, state

> In Britain today, a generation of children are growing up with poorer prospects to look forward to than their parents did as children.
>
> Families trapped in poverty are struggling daily to cope in the face of unemployment, poor housing, ill health and debt. No matter how hard parents try, childhood, as you'd know it simply doesn't exist (advertisement, 1995, see fig 4.3)

In this text society is addressed as a whole, but perhaps understandably, in the competitive markets of public attention and donations, they use a dour grainy black and white image of a mother and children in a bleak urban landscape to support the text. (fig 4.3).

Such use of the urban to address issues over children's welfare and rights in general occurs repeatedly in media coverage. An example of this on television is the Charity NSPCC's television advertising campaign (shown on terrestrial commercial television, DEC 1996), which depicted a small girl suffering at the hands of a violent adult while at home. Her house is shown to be a 'typical terraced house' and when she is shown walking alone to school the backdrop is a deeply urban scene with high rise residential blocks and a gas works, the scale and harshness of which emphasises the child's smallness, solitude and vulnerability. Other examples of the urban being used to illustrate general concerns about childhood appear in newspaper features. This can be seen in Peter Newell's (Independent on Sunday, 16 JAN 1994) attack on the government's failure to live up to commitments given at the 1990 World Summit for Children and in the 1991 ratification of the UN convention on the Rights of the Child; and in Barry Hugill's (Observer, 08 AUG 1993) article addressing issues of children being 'prisoners of fear, and problems of the lack of child care'. Newell argues that the rise of children living in poverty in the UK from one in ten in 1979 to one in three in 1994, and other indicators such as malnutrition, access to public transport, increased rates of detention of juvenile offenders, and levels of government expenditure on children, all point to a general, society wide, failure by the government to honour the commitments made on children's rights and welfare at the conferences. But the evidence used to support the thrust of the article are all urban based, such as a study of children's diets in London; and the illustrating photograph, under the headline ***'What a way to treat a child'*** (fig 4.4) again uses a bleak urban landscape, in which a child, albeit smiling, swings on a rope tied to a lamppost into a deserted road, while friends look on.

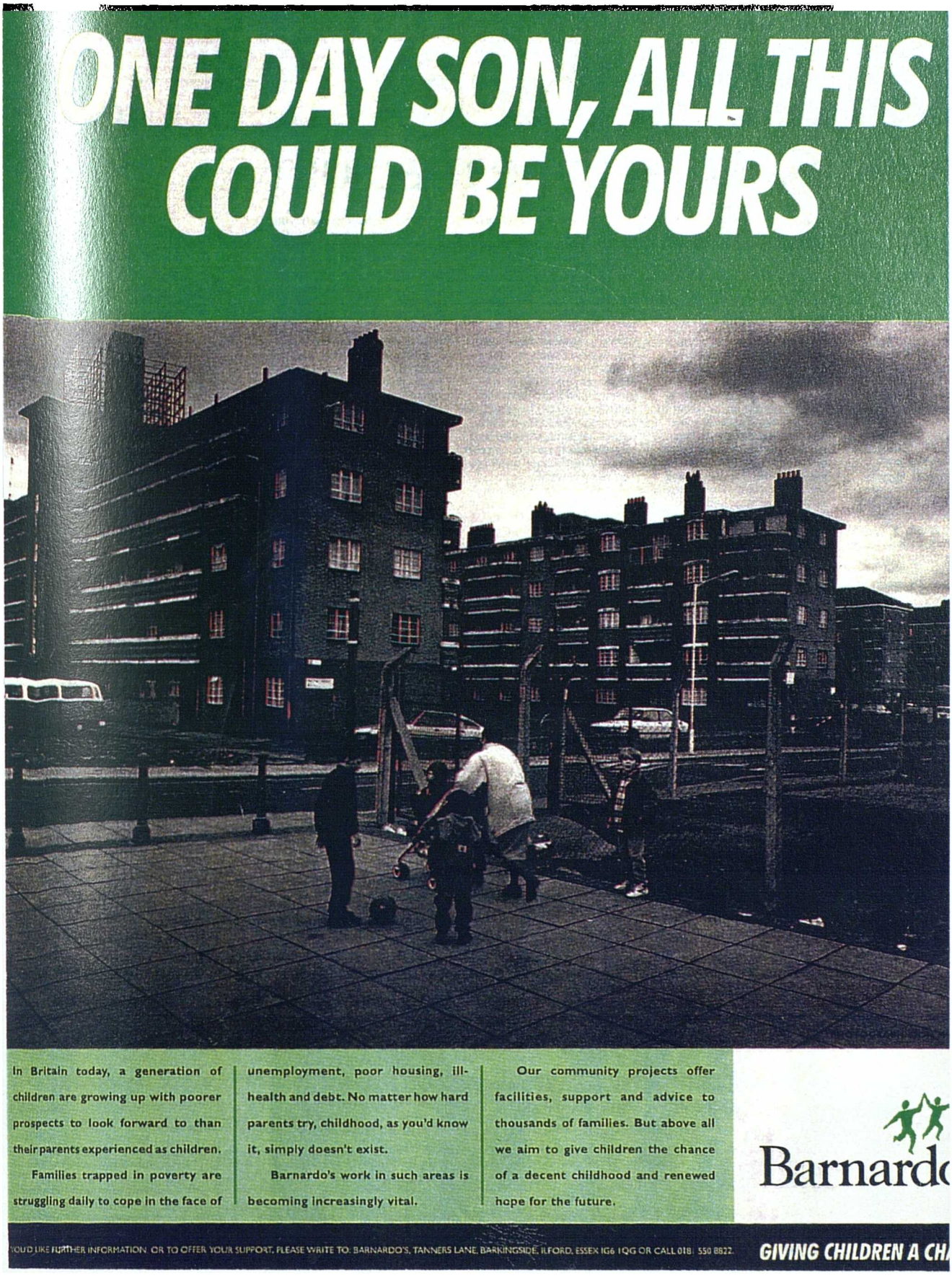
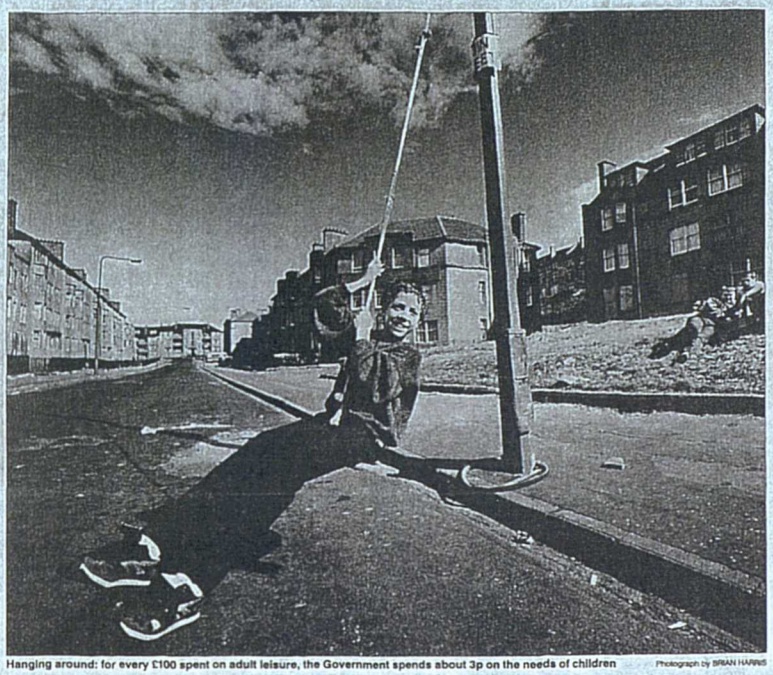


Fig 4.3 The use of the urban to illustrate childhood crisis. (Barnardos publicity, 1996).

Hugill, under the headline ***'The horror of being a child in the Nineties'***, builds his report with accounts of life on a 'Leicester housing estate', and 'Hunslet, a run down suburb of Leeds', where he is told by Clare, who 'is sitting on the steps of a scruffy terraced house...and is 16 but sounds 40: "it used to be the older kids that caused the trouble but now it's the 11-year-olds. Girls are as bad as the boys. they smash cars 'cos it makes 'em look big."' The consequence of this is that more and more parents try and keep their children in or at least under close surveillance. They are 'prisoners of fear' in these urban landscapes.

Is our government wilfully disregarding the needs of children? **Peter Newell** examines an abysmal record

What a way to treat a child



Hanging around: for every £100 spent on adult leisure, the Government spends about 3p on the needs of children

Photograph by BRIAN HARRIS

WE KNOW that many voters feel disappointed by the Tory governments of the past 15 years. But what about those who have no vote and no political clout: the nation's 13 million children?

There has been no citizen's charter for them. Yet, four years ago, at the World Summit for Children attended by 71 heads of government, Margaret Thatcher made "a solemn commitment to give high priority to the rights of children". A year later, in 1991, the British Government became the 105th country to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, setting detailed standards for treatment of the world's children.

Britain is shortly to deliver its first progress report to the UN: a draft circulated for token consultation just before Christmas reveals complacency. What *should* it say? How have our children fared under Tory governments, measured against the UN standards ratified by the Government?

The Convention says that all children must have "a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development". In Britain, there has been a devastating increase in child poverty since 1979. According to the latest official statistics, nearly one in three of our children lives in poverty, against one in ten in 1979. The definition of poverty is that accepted across Europe: families living on less than 50 per cent of average income, after housing costs are discounted. And a York University study of families living on benefit in the North-east of England in 1988 found that their lives "and perhaps most seriously the lives of the children in them, are marked by the unrelieved struggle to manage with dreary diets and drab clothing . . ."

The Convention says that *all* children have a right to enjoyment of "the highest attainable standard of health". The Government trumpets its success in reducing the infant mortality rate. But the UK rate is much higher than in many European countries. Further, social class differences appear to have widened since 1979: in 1990, a baby from an unskilled manual worker's home was twice as likely to die during its first year as a baby with professional parents. NHS "reforms" have affected children as much as adults. A survey in 1991-92 by the British Paediatric Association found that every children's intensive care unit in the country was forced, on some occasions, to turn away critically ill patients

dren or pregnant women increased from 87,000 to 121,000 between 1986 and 1990. A study of more than 500 families with children in Glasgow, Edinburgh and London, reported in the *British Medical Journal*, found that a third of dwellings were damp, and almost half contained mould.

In December, the Government persuaded the European Union to slow down the clean-up of dirty beaches and adopt less stringent rules for tap water. It is predominantly children's health, and in some cases children's lives, which are threatened by such environmental hazards. Children's health is also affected by air pollution

which pay no attention to their best interests. Furthermore, a survey in 1990 found that only 9 per cent of seven- and eight-year-olds were allowed to go to school on their own, compared with 80 per cent in 1971. The report concluded: "Over the past two decades British children have suffered a dramatic reduction in their freedom and choice to get about and do things on their own." A recent report from the National

tal care: there is still no statutory provision for paternity leave, and the Government, acting alone, blocked the European Commission Directive on Parental Leave, which aimed at a minimum entitlement to paid or unpaid leave to deal with child-rearing emergencies.

The Convention sets minimum standards for the right to education, and emphasises equal opportunities

A study of diets of London 12-year-olds in 1991 suggested malnutrition at a level which could affect behaviour and ability to learn

heard in all administrative and judicial proceedings affecting them. When attempts were made in Parliament to include in education law some reflection of this principle, Eric Forth, a junior minister, said that he would refrain from calling the idea of consulting pupils "dotty", but he would "condemn it as politically correct".

As a society, we have barely begun to come to terms with the implication that children are no longer to be "seen and not heard" but that they are to be listened to and formally involved in proceedings that directly affect them. The 1989 Children Act implements the principle for children in care and some

pose a real threat to others or themselves. Research sugge that detention leads to more cri and more violent responses later life. But in fact this new Bill ai to lock up about 200 12- to 14-ye olds in new secure training centr extends custodial sentences avi able for 10- to 14-year-olds; a doubles the maximum sentence 15- to 17-year-olds.

And look at the conditions which we lock up young people. Feltham remand centre for yo offenders, where four young peo committed suicide in an eig month period in 1992-93, an insp tion team last year found "filthy a foul-smelling" toilets, reports of adequate food, and a "lack of w training opportunities". It disc ered "an obviously distressed ju nile in a cell, where he had been many hours, with only cardbo furniture" and "no pictures, bo or other distractions from plight". So much for rehabilitati

The UN Convention dema action to protect children from forms of physical or mental v lence". In its draft progress rep the Government goes out of way to defend parents' rights use "reasonable chastisemer and, over the past few years, courts have found the use of be sticks and electric flexes to b children as young as five to be e nently reasonable. A north A court last year acquitted a m who had admitted belting his fi and eight-year-old sons.

The resolution Mrs Thatc signed promised "political actio the highest level". There is no s of such action in the UK. Ot countries – Norway, Austra New Zealand, for example – h set up children's ombudsmen or dependent commissioners to rep sent children's needs and inter at government level: they hold quiries, for example, and assess impact of new policies or legislat on children. The British Gove ment has rejected a detailed p posal for a statutory childr rights commissioner, even thou is supported by the NSPCC, S the Children, in fact *all* the m children's organisations, includ four royal colleges of health.

Such an innovation need be expensive and there is an ob ous source of funds within exist spending plans. The proposals new secure training centres, cluded in the Criminal Justice I will cost at least £30m a year. If Government is serious about commitment to children, it co

Fig 4.4 ***'What a way to treat a child'*** (Independent on Sunday, 16 JAN 1994)

In all these accounts the rural is invisible despite the evidence that it is also penetrated by many of the problems considered. This absence of the rural and the repeated use of the urban as prime examples of childhood crisis imprints the urban as *the* site of childhood crisis, and consequently notions of rural childhood idyll remain not only unchallenged but actually reinforced.

4.4 THE (CONTEMPORARY) URBAN AS CHILDHOOD DISTOPIA

Alongside the discourses considered above which construct the urban as a childhood distopia in the processes of considering the urban and childhood in other contexts, there are discourses which directly set out to establish that the urban, or rather certain sectors of it, *is* a childhood distopia. As there are powerful notions of the countryside being the best environment for childhood, there are also powerful notions that the urban is somehow unsuitable for children. Such notions can be divided into two types. The fist can be seen as an implicit or explicit view that the urban by its very nature is unsympathetic environment for children, the second revolves more around the notion that the urban gone bad becomes a site of childhood deprivation. Often concerns over children in urban settings contain elements of both these views, but the first is relatively constant over time, while the other waxes and wanes according to the condition and understanding of urban spaces. Also these two variants of views of the urban as a childhood environment will have differing spatial patterns. The result of this, as the following example show is that there are degrees of spatial selectivity in these constructions, and also differing views of past and contemporary urban spaces as places of childhood.

4.4.1 'An Innocence Betrayed'

A notable example of this Leila Berg's (1972) *Look at Kids* which baldly states, 'London hates children' (p. 64), but here, it is not the urban *per se* which she sees as hostile to childhood, but rather the scale, form and intensity of contemporary urban life as epitomised by London in particular, and also modern housing estates in general, which are seen as so hostile to children, both in their scale and material form and consequent denial of contact with nature. Berg states that in London

> children are at the bottom of the pile, the lowest rung of the ladder, the small scapegoat available to the most inadequate or the most harassed adult. And London creates harassed adults, and, by its ever-increasing impossible demands, inadequate ones (ibid).

Berg feels that urban scale is critical in such processes. The larger a town/or city is, the less sympathetic it is to children because the countryside is more remote.

> Where the cities are smaller and you can see hills at the end of the street, they are not nearly so hateful to children. I was on a bus in Sheffield when the school children came out, flooding to the bus stops. Now a Londoner, I cringed.
>
> But nobody swore at the children. I could scarcely believe it. The kids hurled themselves onto the bus, clattering clumpily up the stairs, crowded into the downstairs - and the passengers *smiled* at one another in a loving family complicity, and the conductor joked with a hoard of lads on the platform, pretending to punch them. It was amazing to me, and wonderful (pp 64/5).

She also argues that London imposes a rigid disciplinary order on children, it is where ' a child in a tree splits the sky asunder, thunder seems to crack' in a kind of grand disapprobation. Such ordering not only restricts children's spatial freedom but also denies them contact with what nature there is to be found there.

> The children on council estates cannot keep animals, and cannot grow flowers, I am sure children need to be in touch with the earth, need to have their finger in soil, and their eyes looking into an animal's, or bird's eyes. these children are dissociated from the universe, and the rhythm of the universe; they are like a note that has been hurled out of the score.
>
> But in the city, rain is only an enemy. Earth is horrid detested dirt, that they furtively, guiltily bring in on their shoes. Rain turns dirt to mud, and you get clobbered for that. The approved ground is concrete. What you grow things on is blotting paper (p. 69).

The cover illustration (fig 4.5) of *Childhood: an innocence betrayed* (Observer in association with Barnardos, 18 MAY 1995), continues these on-going constructions of childhood being betrayed by urban environments. It also uses classic country childhood idyll imagery to emphasise what has been betrayed, what has been lost. The picture shows a child alone and uncertain, perhaps unhappy and unhealthy, being watched by figures clearly bearing the iconography of Enid Blyton's, *Famous Five* children - dog, rucksacks, 1950's outdoor clothes, clean cut, concerned, wholesome and healthy. They look from the vantage point of the appropriate countryside into the inappropriate urban, but to put a double perspective on it, also from the appropriate past into the inappropriate present. So here, at least the betrayal centres around past country childhoods, which as already shown are the main settings of notions of idyll, being compared with contemporary urban landscapes.

Of course, there is a long history of the city being seen as a childhood distopia. I have already shown how Blake contrasted his rural set *Songs of Innocence*, with urban set *Songs of Experience* which lamented the condition of children, and humanity more generally, within urban settings. Many of the works of Dickens, notably *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby, The Old Curiosity Shop*, famously portray many scenes of (mostly urban) childhood poverty and cruelty.

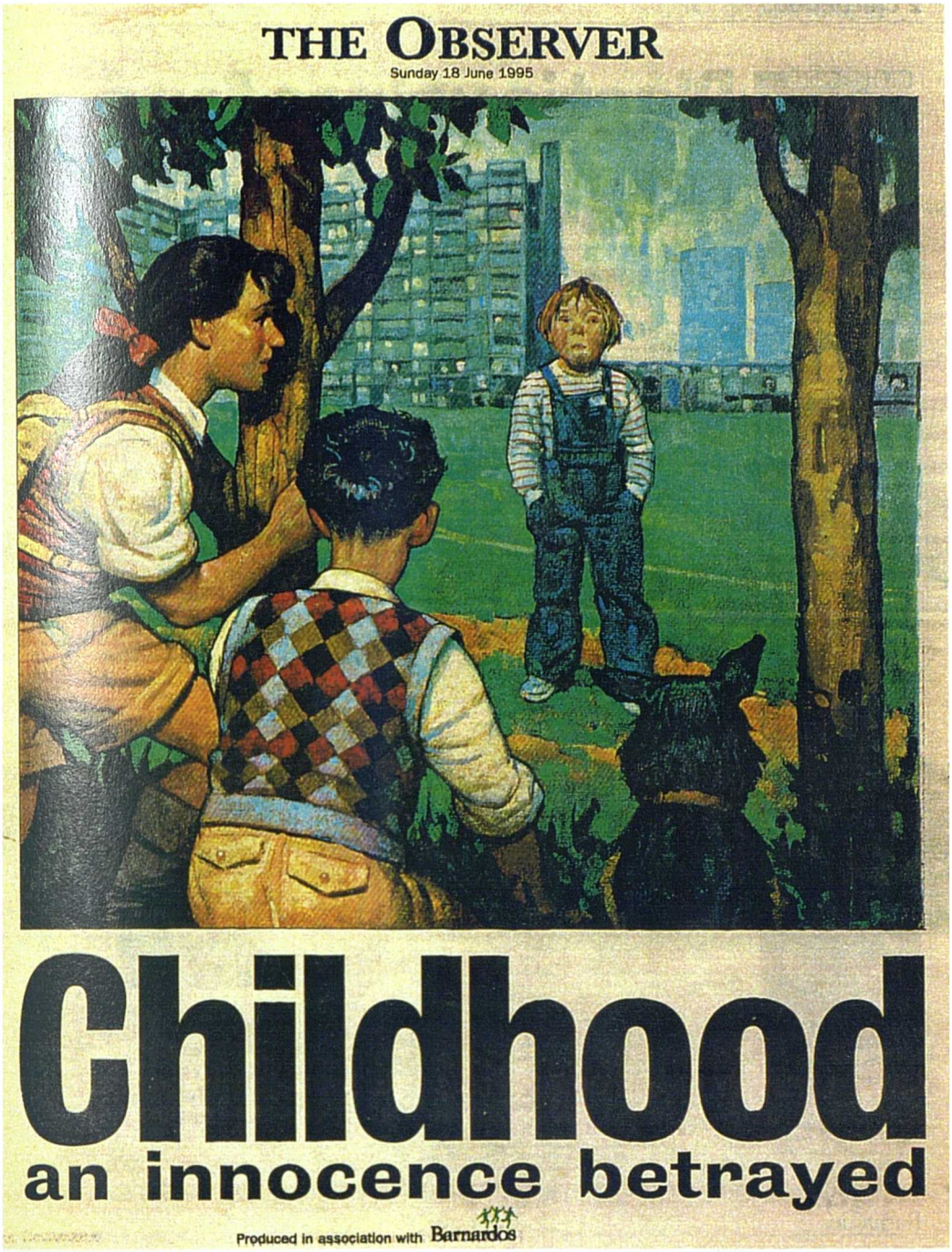


Fig 4.5 '*Childhood: an innocence betrayed*' (the Observer in association with Barnardos, 18 MAY 1995).

But having said that, intriguingly some images of childhood idyll do appear in past urban contexts. Berg (1972) talks of how the street used to be a place of childhood,

> (it) was full of drama. We lived in it. It was our territory. Every stage of our growth was marked on it, our wonderment, our terror, our triumphs, our deprivations, our compensations, our hate and our love. We knew every single person in our street (p. 44).

Berg's text on children in the city, as is that of Ward (1978), and Humphries Mack and Perks (1988), are accompanied by illustrations which are split between showing urban childhood deprivation, and urban childhood idyll. The latter typically being

street scenes of children playing together. In the She magazine 'have our children lost the gift of innocence' and the article by Houghton on the over-ordering of contemporary children's lives, from which I have already quoted, the same image of children playing in a street is used to illustrate the text. This image (fig 4.6) clearly from the past, is felt to be safe enough to carry ideas of past childhood innocence and freedom despite it being an obviously urban environment. At this point it is possible to construct the notion that such visions of past urban childhoods, had at least some of the elements which made up notions of rural idyll already considered. These street scenes show children, outdoors together, playing games, having adventures in gangs, often free from close adult supervision. Nature is still missing of course, as Berg points out, (p. 44) - but even that was not always so, as will be shown later by quotes from the poet Edward Thomas's account of his London childhood - so the street and the urban more generally cannot be as the countryside in terms of childhood idyll, but nevertheless is was a place for children, a place of childhood now lost.

Fig 4.6 The past urban environment - the street - as childhood idyll. (She Magazine, JUL 1994).

So although the urban has a history of being seen as a childhood distopia, this has been interrupted by notions of nostalgic idyll. It is contemporary urban childhood which come under the most critical focus, both in terms of the restriction of freedom as already considered through notions of fear, but also what happens to children, who for some reason or another, still do 'get out'. It could be said, and in fact often is by politicians addressing issues of crime, that not to know where your children are, and what they are doing, is now seen as a sign of irresponsible, 'bad', parenting, not only because of what might happen to the child, the dangers which might threaten, but also because of what the child might be up to, the dangers they might pose. Thus surveillance and, ultimately, close control of children becomes at once an desired practice of parenting, and yet a fundamental challenge to our notions of childhood idyll. Here childhood lies on the cusp between notions of 'little angels and little devils' already considered. Contemporary urban landscapes are where children can most readily become 'little devils'.[3]

4.4.2 Feral Children, City Vermin

The accounts above are full of children, and 'gangs of children' who for various reasons have escaped the constriction of freedom, a constriction which generally is one of the elements of concern about childhood. But these children are not received with affection and joy, for instead they fall prey to the end of innocence discourse of childhood. Having broken the bounds of (often, it is assumed, dysfunctional) domestic and even educational authority, they are seen as feral, dangerously and destructively wild. These are the children of Prince Charles's 'Lord of the Flies syndrome', when they 'revert to savagery when...cut of from civilisation' (Daily Mail 27 OCT 1993). These are Warner's (1994) 'little devils' which strike fear and uncertainty deep into adulthood. Like her 'little angels' they carry burdens of adult constructions way beyond what their immediate circumstances should hold. 'The Child has never been seen as such a menacing enemy as today. Never before have children been so saturated with all the power of projected monstrousness to excite repulsion - and even terror' (ibid, p. 43).

---

[3] This debate about children at large in urban environments has become a high profile political issue with the Shadow Home Secretary, Jack Straw, making statements about the possibilities of imposing curfews on children, and also pronouncing on the need for a national debate about children's bedtimes.

These issues have recently be explored through research into parental attitudes by Gill Valentine (1997c), in her paper 'Angels and Devils: the moral landscapes of childhood' Here Valentine picks up and explores many of the same sets of constructions I have used, and uses Warner's metaphorical devise of childhood as being peopled by being innocent 'little angels' and yet also dangerous little 'devils' in the context of 1990's moral panic about "the end of innocence" ' (p.14). Her argument is that although these constructions have co-existed in a varying relationship throughout the history of modern childhood, there is now a post Bulger moral panic about the contemporary condition of childhood in which the image of 'devil' is gaining ascendancy. Valentine reports that her research engaged with parents of children age 8 - 11 in 'city, urban non metropolitan and rural areas in Greater Manchester, Cheshire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire'. Although in this paper she does not make any sharp distinctions between these locations in the way that I am doing - a rural/urban distinction, it is noticeable that *all* the interview transcripts she quotes from, when considering children as 'devils' come from the urban areas in which the research was done in. Here there are a number of accounts by adults of how they saw children out in public spaces as a threat and menace.

At this point children can become classed as vermin, and notoriously, the 'street children' of some Brazilian cities are literally exterminated as such by 'death squads'[4]. But such imagery of children as vermin is not exclusive to 'third world' settings alone. The Independent (9 OCT 1993) reviewed how a child criminal had become labelled 'Ratboy' by national tabloid newspapers, and a symbol of feral childhood in depressed urban settings. The name came about because the boy, who had admitted 55 offences and absconded from care 37 times, had finally been found and arrested by police when hiding out in a ventilation duct on the estate where he lived. The story was picked up first by the local press and then a national tabloid who coined the nickname. After that other papers picked up the story and,

> The police obligingly posed beside his hiding place, and Robbie's (not the child's real name) exploits were rapidly inflated in the popular press into the archetype of the mythical outlaw - the fugitive in a secret underworld, a maze of tunnels beneath the urban landscape, a creature whose identity combined elements of the Ninga Turtle and the sewer rat.

[4] Martha Gellhorn in a recent article on Brazilian street children (Observer, 10 NOV 1996), reports that there is considered to be some 6 million street children in Brazilian cities, and that they are 'destitute and defenceless, an endangered species...For the first time ever and anywhere, these children began to be killed as casually as if they were rabbits with myxomatosis - an obscene form of street cleaning. The murders have continued for more than a decade a spread to every city and even small towns'. One NGO estimated that an average of 18 children a day were murdered by police 'death squads'.

The history of the city as childhood distopia carries with it a history of children as menace and threat. Lionel Rose (1991) tells of a significant history of child vagrancy, where in London in 1848 it was estimated that there were 30,000 homeless children in an overall population of 2.5 Million, and that, 'child beggars in fact formed a high proportion of all beggars in the country' (p. 80). Such statistics were collected by reformers such as Lord Shaftsbury and Dr. Barnardo in their campaigns for children's welfare, but these children also came under much more unsympathetic gaze, Ward (1978) tells that 'the drifting child population always was considered a menace to the city. In 1703 and 1717 vagrant, begging and thieving boys in the streets of London were rounded up and shipped off to Virginia' (pp 56/7).

4.4.3 Strange Games, New Alphabets

Such feral children are still seen as children, and are still seen as playing games, but unlike the innocent healthy games of country childhoods or even past street childhood idylls, such children are seen as playing strange games, synthetic games, dangerous games [5].

The Guardian (31 AUG 1995), reporting on the death of a pensioner killed on a Leeds high rise housing estate, stated that she had been killed by a lump of concrete dislodged 120 feet above her head, in a 'bizarre summer holiday playground for unsupervised children'. Somehow children from the estate were getting onto the roof of one of the blocks of flats and where throwing debris over the edge. One resident recounted that 'lumps of wood came down - I looked up and there were five kids on the roof looking over. I shouted up at them but they just laughed like drains'. The article reported that 'a 10-year-old boy is due to appear before Leeds youth court this morning charged with manslaughter. Two boys, aged 9 and 10 were released without charge yesterday after being questioned over the death'. Tower blocks were revealed as the site of yet further bizarre and deadly games when a 10 year old boy fell to his death while 'lift surfing'. This occurred on a Leeds council estate, and received wide media attention. The Guardian reported

[5] This shift in constructions of childhood games from a past of innocent pranks and mischief to a contemporary construction of much more sinister and menacing activities is captured in Valentine's (forthcoming) research when parents interviewed compared the memories of their childhood to those of their own and other children.

(30 MAY 1997) that lift surfing, where children gain access to the lift shaft and ride up and down on the top of the lifts, using the external maintenance controls, was a craze which had 'spread among Swarcliffe's seven tower blocks'. The report added that lift surfing which had first been reported in London in 1989, was one of a number of 'dangerous dares' some of which had claimed the lives of children. Four children have died 'train surfing' since 1974, the first incident being in London, and there is a craze of 'bus surfing' in Tyneside.

On another estate, the Manor in Sheffield, featured in the Daily Telegraph, (Caroline Davies, 26 OCT 1995).'church leaders are talking about a complete breakdown of society'. Again here children and youth are used as the focus of the story. The youths who gather in gangs of 40 or 50 with their girlfriends, have nothing to do but 'take drugs, have sex and drink beer and cider around bonfires, but they claim, 'its not us causing trouble, it's the babbies - the kids' (spelling as original) who 'have a disturbing fascination with arson' and entertain themselves by 'smashing windows'.

In some reports such portrayals of inner-city decay and hopelessness reach levels of profound despair. Nick Davies - in an essay prompted by the funeral of a unknown baby girl (named Sally-Ann by Salvation Army workers) who had died minutes after being born, due to no post-delivery care, and whose body had been dumped anonymously (presumably) by a unknown mother - wrote that Sally-Ann became the symbol of 'all the unknown children who are the victims of the new poverty'. Although her history was unknown, Davies speculates that,

> she could have easily been born on the upper floors of one of Birmingham's tower blocks, where scores of young families are trapped for 24 hours a day where the only playground for the children is a corridor decorated with urine and graffiti...She may have come from one of the city estates where the police helicopter comes out at night with its searchlight raking the streets waging the war against drugs... (where) the schools have to put out warnings about suspicious men outside school gates, selling smack and buying sex....Violence surrounds these children, like a wrapper around a sweet. ...across the street there is a man who has been leaving the imprint of his slipper in blue bruises on his two-year old daughter's legs...the police have been...His young wife lives on a tightrope...trying to protect her daughter from the next explosion of rage and trying, too, to tell better lies to the police to persuade them not too take the little girl away from her...Maybe Sally Ann's mother looked at the wasteland around her and decided that if all life was as meaningless as this, then there was no meaning to her child's life either.

Davies in a another piece - the cover story for The Weekend Guardian (2 JAN 1993) - entitled 'Little Joey's Lost childhood', told of an eleven year old boy who's life history was (unlike Sally-Ann's) all too well known for he was -

> a professional burglar. He has been arrested countless times. He once live with a prostitute. He smokes, he drinks, he's mixed up with heroin. Somewhere inside he's just a miserable child. But no one can reach him any more.

The article starts off with a description of Joey's childhood environment.

> Joey grew up in a maze of red-brick council houses which from the distance, even now, appear to be models of working class contentment. Closer, they are dishevelled: tattered scraps of litter in the grass, gutters hang loose, mongrels humping on the pavement; "fuck you" sprayed on the wall. Behind the doors, they are glimpses into a Victorian ghetto: bare boards, bare bulbs, damp walls, carpets sticky with dirt, the rich stink of dogs, women with fags and saggy faces, and children everywhere - barefoot, sticky-nosed, hand me-down packs of them. It reeks of poverty....On the same street, (as Joey lived), David aged 10 has also been arrested for burglary, Another boy has been caught putting sugar in petrol tanks, just for the hell of it.

The cover illustration for this story, in a parody of children's games and toys, depicts the ubiquitous building blocks so beloved as icons of children's play and development, but instead of having simply A, B, C, on them, they have scenes and symbols illustrating: 'B for booze', 'C for Cuffs' (handcuffs), 'D for drugs', 'F for Fags', 'K for Knife', 'N for Nicking', 'O for Old Bill', 'P for prostitute' and 'T for thump' (domestic violence) (fig 4.7). This is the play alphabet of this child, who made all the papers, like 'Ratboy', as a symbol of the crisis of childhood on estates and in inner-cities. Such alphabetical iconography stands in stark contrast to other childhood ABC's, for example *My Farm ABC a 'Look with Mother' children's book*, (undated) which depicts an alphabet of the countryside and country childhood where 'D is for Donkey on his way/Towards the stable for his hay: and 'N is for Nest of straw and hay/And look! Two eggs for tea today' (Fig 4.8).

One report into children's perception of the urban suggests that such visions of it as a childhood distopia are not confined to adults alone but spread to the children themselves. Cedric Cullingford, Professor of Education at the University of Huddersfield conducted a series of interviews with children aged 6 - 9 asking them about their perceptions of the urban environment in which they lived, and concluded that parental perceptions of children being in some way innocent or ignorant of the violence that surrounded them was wrong. He found that children used personal and peer group experiences, along with images from television, and other media to understand and fear the urban settings in which they lived. 'Children express deep suspicions of towns - not as an idea but as a reality, as experienced by them directly and vicariously. *They long for the contrasting idea of the countryside'* (Guardian, Education, 19 APR 1994, emphasis added).

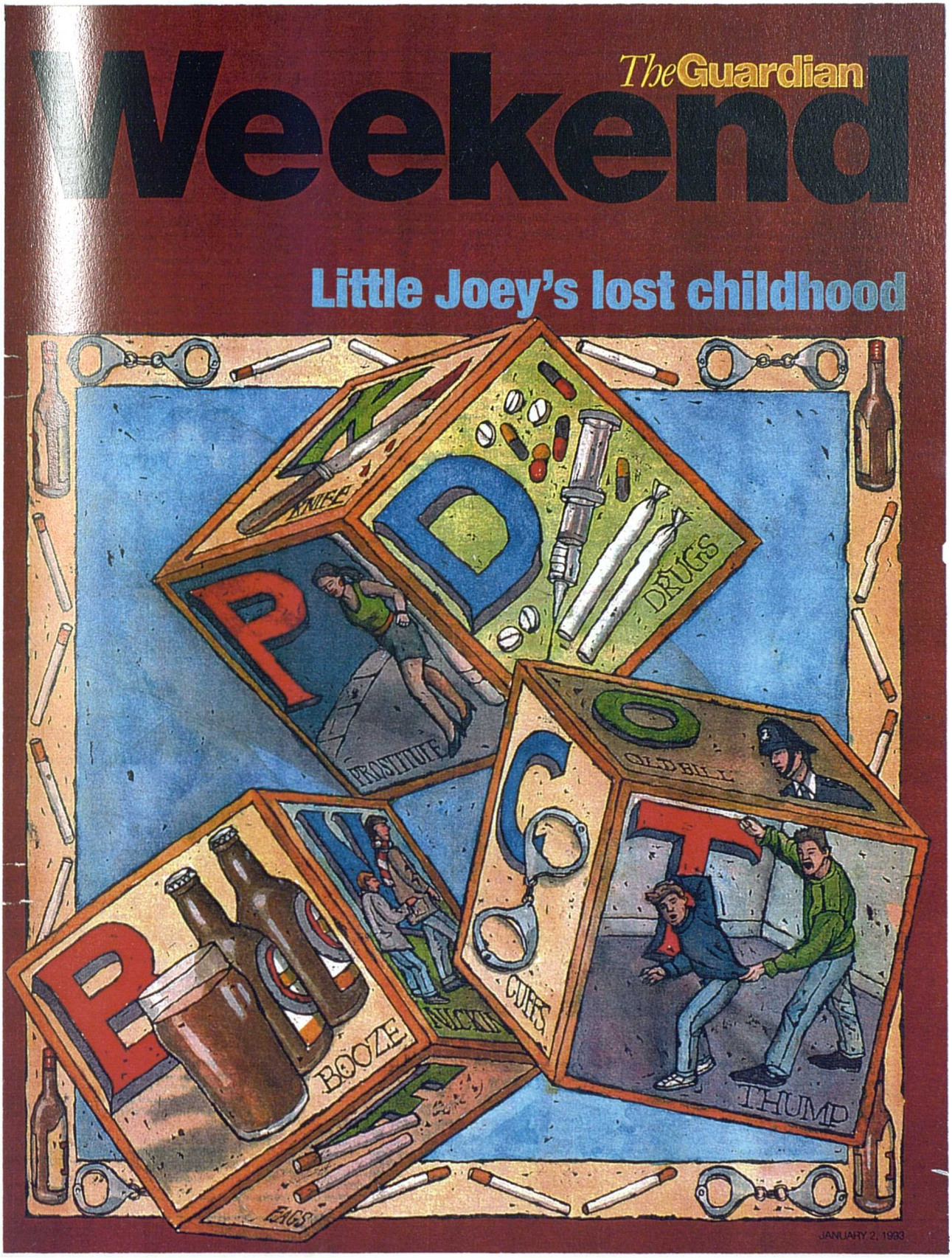


Fig 4.7 One contemporary urban child's ABC. (Cover of The Weekend Guardian 2 JAN 1993).

Fig 4.8 Past rural children's 'ABC'. (Extracts from, *My Farm ABC* , *a Look with Mother children's book*, undated).

The material set out above concentrates on parts of the urban rather than the urban as a whole. It is easy to think of spaces within the urban, be they districts, neighbourhoods, streets, schools, clusters of houses and individual houses, which clearly cannot be seen as childhood distopias. To these need to be added the other public spaces which provide childhood spaces in one form or another, for example, leisure/sports facilities, and others which offer commodified forms of childhood

space. The great spatial differentiations of class and wealth which are present in nearly all urban areas means that experiences of urban childhood differ dramatically. But I have concentrated here on the urban as childhood distopia, because, firstly as I have shown, some writers, such as Berg, do not spatially qualify their concerns about the suitability of the urban (in her case, London) as a childhood environment. Moreover, good news is no news, and it is the bad press which some urban environments receive which become prominent signals, the spatial specificity of which becomes blurred, especially when the message travels some distance. Perhaps more significantly in terms of this analysis, in the differentiated urban there are always risks of contamination of some spaces by the possible proximity of, or mixing with, the undesirable spaces considered above. Thus the urban as a whole has a potential impurity in terms of being a childhood environment.

As is shown in the second half of this study, the case study village is considered by those who live there, and those who visit it, as being a relatively pure (Sibley, 1995) (idyllic) space, not least in terms of it as an environment for childhood. Such constructions may be much harder to achieve for urban spaces, even if some residential spaces has gone as far as employing 'private security firm to patrol its leafy avenues' (ibid p.38). Again this is particularly so in terms of childhood. Schools and other institutional structures, and/or social networks, youth cultures, and the spaces they use, may be a key means of interpenetration between differing urban social/cultural/material spaces. This was vividly illustrated by the BBC 2 drama 'King Girl' (9 DEC 1995) where the life of middle class pupil and that of her family, and their domestic space, is cruelly violated through conflict with another girl pupil at the same school, who comes from a nearby run down housing estate and who has a desperate family background. So here a middle class urban enclave is portrayed as being polluted by proximate areas of urban desolation.[6]

To conclude I am not suggesting that the urban should be seen as uniformly being a childhood distopia. The urban can offer some of the most desired and valued resources for children in terms of entertainment, education, and possibilities for

[6] The estate and the girl's family is portrayed as dysfunctional with a capital D and within the story a number of minor characters who are 'lost' children appear. The middle class domestic space is violated to the extent of a gang chasing the victim home and one of them urinating through the letterbox when the front door is shut on them.

companionship. But these attributes are interspersed with a number of ongoing cultural constructions which either directly or indirectly do consider the urban in general, or particular types of urban spaces, as childhood distopias. These as I hope I have shown, are often quiet drastic and powerful in their approach, and they reflect and contribute to an overall unease about childhood and the urban, particularly when the rural is seen as an ever present, but often remote, alternative. In the material gathered from the case study village it will be shown that constructions of the village as a 'good place to bring up kids' is often directly set against the possible alternative of the urban as a place to bring up children.

PART TWO

LOCAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDYLL AND THE COUNTRY CHILDHOODS OF ALLSWELL

> It is through the medium of local activity,
> through the medium of place- and region-specific practices,
> that spatially extensive power relations are manifested.
> Although spatially extensive power relations
> may appear to transcend local particularities,
> it is through the medium of local activity
> that "macroscopic social change...must pass,"
> become altered
>
> (Allan Pred, 1990, p.15, spacing as in original).

This second part of the dissertation is intended to study the various discourses and points raised in Part One, in the context of a particular place. The quote above from Pred is seen to be one of a number of expressions of how all aspects of social, political, cultural and social lives, are played out in concrete circumstances and specific places. In other words, the generalised always has to articulated through the specific. It is thus argued that although generalised, or widely spread cultural discourses, such as notions of country childhood idyll, do have discernible and therefore analysable form, their outworkings, or applications, including the structuring of children's lives, will always occur in specific contexts which will bring with them their own milieu of circumstances which will inevitably re-negotiate these generalised discourses in the processes of interpretation and application. Such local scale and the difference there in, has already been acknowledged as a vital component in understanding cultural constructions of the rural, particularly Cloke and Milbourne's (1992) concern for the local scale and consequences of idyll discourses; and Crouch's (1992) concern for local renegotiations of wider popular constructions of the rural and rural idyll. Inevitably within such approaches, case studies which look at the local and the specific are going to play a prominent part in the research which tries to address these issues. As Robert Stake puts it (1995), 'grand generalisations... can be modified by case study (p. 7)... the real business of case study is particularisation, not generalisation' (p. 8); and as briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, Latour (1988) is critical of 'conventional' social science's mistrust of the case study and argues that its perceived weakness, that of it localness, is in fact a strength. Thus the case study can be seen as a methodological tool well suited to

current trends in critical theory and their collective characteristic of aiming to de-generalise.

Adult discourses of country childhood will be a complex blend of the generalised and the specific, and the consequent structuring of children's lives will be affected by both the general and the specific, and also will be applied in the specific circumstances of the local. So the intention is to report on the makings of case study of a small country village which has a significant population of children. The material narrated from this process is then set alongside the wider discourses of childhood and country childhood considered in the preceding chapters.

The next chapter (5) sets out to detail the research techniques used to construct the 'data' concerning adult constructions of childhood within the village which are subsequently used in the remaining chapters. Chapter 6 then provides, firstly an introduction to the case study village and then goes on to explore parts of the landscape of the place itself, in order to ground the research and provide a contextual link for the more detailed discussions to come. Chapter 7 then narrates (some) adult constructions of childhood within the village in some detail, using the material from interviews with adults and my participant observation in the village. From this, I attempt to begin to narrate how such views of childhood in the village actually structure aspects of children's lives. Chapter 8, again using interview and participant observation material and other more novel research methods, then makes some attempt at the very problematic process of looking at some of these issues from 'the children's' point of view, - 'how their world is experienced from within'. Chapter 9 then provides a series of concluding themes.

CHAPTER 5

THE CASE STUDY: METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES

In Chapter 1 I set out the broad theoretical frameworks within which this work as a whole is set, here I now want to go into more detailed description of the specific research techniques and strategies used. I also need to add that the methodology used for the research with children is dealt with separately at the beginning of chapter eight. While qualitative research with adults now has a substantial body of theory and practice behind it, the same cannot be said for children; the problems presented by this, and by other conceptual difficulties related to researching children I think warrant a separate treatment of the approaches taken. In Chapter 7, I try to set out how parents (and to an extent other adults) 'see' (their) children within the case study village; how this is connected to wider (mainly popular) discourses of children in the countryside; how this may have changed; and finally to try and extrapolate some of the structuring of children's lives this has. This chapter essentially sets out the research methodologies employed to do this. Firstly in section 5.1 the research techniques for 'constructing data' with adults are set out, then in 5.2, key research issues, notably access, ethics and doing research in my home village are addressed, then finally in section 5.3 the processes of 'data analysis' employed are set out.

5.1 CONSTRUCTING DATA

One of the essential aims of the dissertation is to show how children's worlds may be structured through notions of the country childhood idyll, so it was necessary to construct narratives of adult constructions of childhood and the consequences of such in a particular setting. To do this a qualitative strategy was adopted which consisted of a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with parents and other adults in the village, and also an ongoing programme of participant observation. Parents are emphasised in the research for they clearly can have very considerable and direct input into the structuring of their children's lives. Other more peripheral techniques were also employed to tell other bits of the story and these are also set out below.

5.1.1 Participant Observation

My partner and I have lived in the case study village since 1991, we have two children, boys aged two and five. Other members of my family, (parents and sister; bother, sister-in-law and their three children, have lived there since 1985. Although this has given us personally, and me in research terms a quicker entrée into (sections) of the village, it has not been a main focus of my research, for the work has concentrated on the middle years of childhood and a bit beyond that, which our own children fall below, and my nephew and niece have just about moved out of through the period of the research. (These issues are considered later as the latter have proved useful as informants and for introductions to some other older children). Perhaps more significant is that the village is my home village, and this has a number of ramifications which are also considered later, but particularly in terms of access and the conducting of participant observation.

Participant observation is one of the key methodologies of qualitative research in general and ethnographic research in particular. (Bryman, 1988; Jackson, 1994). Jackson (1994) turns to Kluckhohn (1940) for a defining description of this process, 'a conscious and systematic sharing, in so far as circumstances permit, in the life-activities and, on occasion, in the interests and affects of a group of persons' (Jackson, 1994, p 434). But beyond this basic form, the process of participant observation can vary in the proportions of each of the two constitutive elements it consists of, and this can be to the extent of ranging from the total observer variant to the total participant variant (Gans, 1967; Babbie, 1992)[1]. In the case of this research the boundaries between being a participant and being an observer are particularly dynamic, and sometimes indistinct, and also range far across the spectrum defined above. But essentially, as I have participated in 'village life' I have tried to observe how adults see and act upon children, and how the children themselves react to and also transgress these constructions.

I have already said that elements of my extended family occupy two households in the village. For reasons too long winded to explain, we were close friends with two other families who also moved to the village, (in fact next door, and next door but one) at roughly the same time as us, and have respectively one boy age 4, and a

[1] I would question the possibility of the 'pure' forms of these variants, but it is a useful conceptualisation of participant observation.

boy and girl aged seven and nine. (These latter two become important figures in subsequent narratives). We have also become close to two other families, one with two boys, three and five, and the other two girls, three and six. Beyond these we are in less close, but ongoing contact with four or five other families, all with children. Beyond this again we know on an acquaintance level, maybe half of the village. I, in my roles as Parish Councillor, member of football and cricket pool, and researcher, can recognise most of the rest of the village we do not have contact with. There are also a number of what I term satellite families whom we know, who do not live in the village, but for various reasons (notably church, cricket, toddler group, past residence in village, pub regulars), have close links with it, and appear at many of the functions. Consequently I felt I had a reasonable degree of access to carry out participant observation mainly through the processes of my 'village life'. But this was also augmented by a more systematic accruing of information through conversations about aspects of village life and people I did not have such ready access to. In such circumstances I feel I am a genuine participant, with the advantages that this brings, (this is explored more fully later), but this also made for a quite complex position in terms of research and living in the village. Often I would be at an event, or witnessing some scene in the course of my everyday domestic/social life, when it would dawn on me that I should be 'observing' this in research terms. These moments were telling in that it sometimes would be accompanied with a moment of excitement and adrenaline rush, and my mood and actions would change. On a number of occasions this has prompted me to go back home to get my camera. Conversely on other occasions I would set out from the start of some event primarily as an observer, going to somewhere where, if not for the purposes of the research I would not have gone, and ended up being more of a participant and forgetting my research objectives. These are the poles of a spectrum in which various instances of 'genuine' participation were mixed with various levels of observation. I took a lot of photographs within this process, and again these often have a mix of 'personal' and 'professional' motivations, but events and scenes were recorded more extensively and systematically than would have been the case if I was not researching within the village. This process was eased by being a resident of the village with children, for it did not seem out of place, but notes were never taken in 'the field' because this would have been a much more obviously alien process which would have reminded people that I was more observer more than participant. (These issues are considered more fully in the

section on doing research in my home village). Notes were written down once I was at home.

5.1.2 In Depth Semi Structured Interviews

As well as the ongoing participant observation of the village, a series of interviews were conducted, the details of which are set out below. Although these are a distinct element of the research, they to an extent, are blurred at the margins with the participant observation, in that within the latter brief interviews with people were conducted, and sometimes issues raised at an interview was re-raised either by me or a respondent in other settings. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) point out, the difference between these two research procedures 'are as not as great as is sometimes suggested' (p. 141). This, they claim is because in both instances, the effects and power relations of the researcher's presence must be considered, as also should issues of access and rapport. That being said, the interviews were intended to access narratives not easily reachable by participant observation. The participant observation can be seen as constructing extensive narratives, of aspects of collective life in the village, and in some cases more intensive narratives of aspects of everyday which were 'in the open' and thus observable. The interviews were critical for producing a wide range of more intensive constructions which engaged with individual positions and understandings, and for trying to recreate the internalised or privately performed aspects of life which remain closed to participant observation.

In all twenty-four interviews were conducted with twenty-seven adults, (three interviews were conducted with couples). Of these:- one was with a local authority officer responsible for children's play facilities in the area. This was intended to provide some perspective on how the local authorities with responsibilities for play provision with the village and other areas of the district, saw the needs of the children in the village. One with a visiting parent who comes with her children and stays in the village at her sister's house, (an outsider's view). three with the longest residing residents in the village, two of whom are life long residents. One with a 'medium term' resident who had grown up in the village, and has a detailed knowledge and archive of village life. The remaining nineteen interviews were with parents with children currently living in the village. These interviews were conducted mostly on a one to one basis but some were conducted with couples as parents.

This was primarily dictated by circumstances, and I was happy to roll with these to see if differences occurred. All interviews with village residents were conducted, bar one, at the research subject's house, (the exception was interview no. 8 which was conducted in our house), and all were recorded.

The intention in having a semi-structured format was to ensure all the points I wanted to cover were raised, but also that there was space within which other narratives could develop. At first quite an extensive structure was used but this was abandoned after three interviews because, firstly, I felt I was often hurrying onto the next point and not letting exchanges develop to the extent they might have done, and secondly, the fiddling about with clipboard and notes I felt proved to be intrusive. Given that I knew most of the interviewees to a greater or lesser extent, I was keen to conduct to interview 'as naturally' as possible. Thus the interviews became more 'conversational' about the village, children, childhood and children in the village. I also felt I had a pretty good grasp of what I wanted to cover and so the structure was retained, but allowed to emerge more in the course of conversation, using connections and associations to bring in what I wanted to ask. In some cases the conversation veered quite far from the subject matter onto other aspects of mutual interest, but I did not see this as a cause for great concern (until transcription!) as it emphasised the conversational nature of the interview and hopefully the relaxed nature of the event.

At the outset of the interview I set out very briefly what I was doing, asked permission to tape the interview and stressed that the material would be transcribed and possibly used in my research, unless a specific request was made otherwise. I emphasised my own position as resident and parent living in the village, stressing that my aim was to explore how the research subject saw their children's lives in the village and also other children in village, and in countryside more generally, adding that I had no 'particular axe to grind'.

5.1.3 Other Methodologies

As well as the two main methods set out above for constructing narratives I also employed other 'minor' methodologies, namely walking, which was about trying to engage with the material landscape of the place, and also the collection of textual references to the village.

WALKING

Briefly, this may seem a somewhat strange research methodology category, but I feel it is a very relevant one, particularly in terms of 'participant observation' of the physicality of the place, the differing routes and spaces that it consists of, and also in getting (literally) differing perspectives of the village as a space and consequently conceptual perspectives. These walks were not so much hunts as strolls. Strolls as considered by Game (1991). Such walking she argues and its accompanying writing - as in the work of Rousseau, Barthes, Benjamin, Auster - offers a possible disruption to dominant enlightenment forms of knowing, particularly 'homogeneity, abstraction, singularity' (ibid, p. 153). Although I will not claim so much portent for my walks, they seemed at the time strangely exciting and thronged with ghostly possibilities, which I think, essentially stemmed from vagueish notions that there are many ways of experiencing a place, many other ways of being in a place. These may have been sparked by finding a track which had been made by someone walking out into a field of wheat; a gate between a garden and field, all overgrown and obviously not used; or even the often used run of some animal through a hedge. Walking is an intimate process between person and place, it is a way of getting in touch with a place, and I did have at one stage, the notion (quickly abandoned), of basing the whole dissertation on a series of walks.

A number of walks were conducted, which routed around and through the village and the surrounding landscape, in some cases taking in specific places, and it is from these that the photographs of the landscapes come. These walks were mostly conducted in week day time when work and school meant few people, (and often none) were encountered. Consequently this was not social, but landscape, participant observation. As an example of what these produced, thoughts were formed in walks which followed the 'edge' of the village, often not on recognised paths, about the apparently varying nature, distinctness and permeability of the edge of the village where it butts up to the surrounding agroscapes.

TEXTUAL SOURCES

Finally, and again briefly, I have a drawn upon a number of sources of textual material relating to the village. These include the parish magazine, which comes out bi-monthly; the material that is passed on to me as my role as a parish councillor,

i.e. all planning applications, structure plans, and matters relating to all kinds of local authority policy and administration; and finally an archive of photographs of the village collected by the chairman of the parish council, who is also one of the people interviewed.

5.2 ACCESS; RAPPORT; RESEARCH AT HOME; ETHICS AND OTHER ISSUES

This section now addresses what are rightly seen as key issues in the effective construction of research using qualitative methods, particularly through the process of participant observation, which unlike the interview process, can become rather indistinct (to the research subject) as a process of research, thus leading to questions of the research subject's understanding of, and sanctioning of, the research process. This and issues of access and rapport which also have critical bearing on the effectiveness or otherwise of a project, also need careful consideration in the context of doing research in my home village.

5.2.1 Access and Rapport

Access is so clearly fundamental to research in general and in depth qualitative/ethnographic type studies in particular, that it is a major feature of most methodological considerations, (for example see Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Cook and Crang, 1995). Firstly, there is the paradoxical problem of not really knowing if what you want to study is studyable in a place until you have tried to do it. In this research, my extant knowledge of the village, set against the theoretical orientations which were addressing issues of children in the countryside, (particularly Philo, 1992) led me to the initial conclusion that this was a relevant case study to carry out. Secondly, there is simply the point that if people will not talk to you, will 'not let you in', either literally and/or metaphorically, then meaningful research is going to be very problematic, if not impossible. Although living in a place does not automatically mean the granting of access, I felt in this case that I would get a positive response from most people in the village.

Not only is it fundamental to have access to a situation in order to carry out qualitative studies, but as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) also point out rapport, (once access is gained) is important, both in terms of participant observation and

interview processes. Although living in a place does not necessarily ensure rapport any more than it does access, and in fact it might mean the opposite, in this case I felt I did have good rapport with family, friends, and acquaintances in the village prior to the research, and that others would be open to approaches. Beyond this I felt that many people in the village would take part in and support such a project out of village loyalty and curiosity.

I also have had the advantage, although there are methodological warnings about information overload (for example Cook and Crang, 1995) , of being able to practice participant observation, albeit at sometimes quite low levels, over a period of some four years in particular relation to this project. This may not be useful in terms of observing and recording a myriad examples of actions and events, but rather in terms of having a more strategically refined view of the village over a longer period.

More practically, gaining access to a strange community and the children within it, would I think have been possibly extremely problematic. In this case, as I am a parent in the village, and I am known to many other parents in the village, (we are in the baby sitting circle, and I have sometimes attended the toddler group with our elder child, and I/we have 'looked after' neighbours children on numerous occasions), parents are at ease with me asking their children questions, watching them, taking photographs of them, and talking to them. At village events I have taken pictures of children at will, often my own children have been in the frame, but not exclusively. Thus this potentially fraught part of my research blurs with what a camera happy parent might get up to any way, so there is little problem, but as a stranger, or relative stranger in a community this may have been much more difficult.

5.2.2 On Doing Research In My Home Village

I have already addressed the issue of doing research in my home village in terms of rapport and access, particularly with/to children, but there are clearly other issues raised by doing research in one's own community. My stock answer to people who have quizzed me about the wisdom/difficulties of doing research in my home village rather than elsewhere, has been to say that I have swapped one set of problems and possibilities for another. And I think that is basically so. Below I briefly review

what I feel are both the problems and possibilities of researching one's home setting in general, and in the particular circumstances of this work in this place.

GENUINE PARTICIPATION? DEPTHS OF KNOWING

I have been somewhat disturbed when hearing research summary papers at post graduate forums and other conferences, which have blithely stated something along the lines of - 'I am going to spend three months 'in the field' getting to know the community really well as a participant observer'. I have two main problems with this. Firstly, I am wary of the potential arrogance of researchers assuming they can really get to know a community to which they are strange within a short period of time. Clearly detailed and in depth information can be gathered, but only a very fragmented and specialised view can be drawn. This is not to say that to live in a community is to get to know it thoroughly, but there is more chance of a thoroughness from at least the one perspective. Secondly, its seems to me that a researcher can never be a genuine participant. The purpose of the research presence in a place rendered that presence irredeemably unique and strange. Again, this is not eradicated by researching in one's home setting. I have already said that I found myself often fractured and/or oscillating between participating and observing, but I feel there is a permeability between these two which can aid the observation element, which is essentially the research element.

Cindi Katz (1994) has argued that ethnographic 'field work' usually, and usefully involves the practitioner going to another, strange, place. Critically, she feels, this offers the possibility of being rid of the preconceptions and blindnesses which might afflict those researching in their own cultural settings. Although this argument essentially against doing research at home may have some resonance, it does so in that *all* research has these sorts of problems. Firstly, to go to a 'strange' place is not to loose all one's preconceptions and blindnesses. In fact, if the location is in some ways 'exotic' and significantly culturally alien, these will surely be different but none the less powerful and problematic from a research point of view. Secondly researching one's own home, to an extent makes it strange. It becomes a different place. In the context of this research I literally got different perspectives by walking to parts of the case study area I had not been to before. This symbolises new conceptual, aesthetic and emotional views of the place also.

5.2.3 Ethical Concerns

To address the main ethical concerns which loom in this an other qualitative research projects I Turn to Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995) consideration of the ethical issues surrounding ethnography which they argue can be grouped under five headings. **Informed Consent**: this is a fundamental and complexly challenging issue for research which involves issues of basic human rights. Should researchers be able to study and report on aspects of people's lives without either their awareness or consent, as in processes of covert participant observation? I do not feel I can get into a general consideration of this issue here, but rather I address it as applied to my research. To start with the simplest aspect - in the taped interviews respondents were told that the tape would be transcribed and the material may be used in my dissertation unless a specific request was made for it not to be so. No such request was made. I therefore feel I have (almost) complete license to use all the material garnered in the interviews. I say almost for if I felt something would cause offence, anger, or embarrassment I may well choose to edit it out myself. As for the participant observation this is a much more sensitive position. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) report arguments that all research 'falls on a continuum between the completely covert and the completely open' (p, 266), and it could be argued that as a researcher practising participant observation is trying to become in some way assimilated into a scenario where acceptance and rapport ensures a relatively natural and 'unaltered' unfolding of events takes place, what is being sought is in fact a 'de facto' covertness, where the research subject has forgotten, or substantially relegated the thought that this other person is primarily doing research. In my case, I think, most people in the village know what I am doing, some in considerable detail, especially friends and those I have interviewed, others in a much more vague sense. So my degree of covertness varies from person to person (see Hammersley and Atkinson 1995), but it also varies from episode to episode, and even moment to moment, as the people I am with forget or focus on the fact that I am 'writing something about the village'. The more covert moments of these combinations are in the grey area of what I feel it is ethical to use, but also they have produced narrative which I feel interesting or revealing. Although the anonymisation of the work helps, people, if they choose to read it, may be able to remember a conversation I had with them, and also recognise each other. Basically, my approach is to make a judgement whether the person speaking, or acting, would

mind the event being written up for the public domain, and there is in fact a certain amount of material which I will not use.

These issues, of course, are influenced by my doing research in my home village. I have 'my position' to think about, and, basically, I don't want to upset friends, neighbours, family and acquaintances. This was in consideration from the start of the project and I always felt that much of the material gathered would be relatively non-controversial, and therefore of use. I am, as a parent living in the village, part of the research subject, and share to a varying degree, values and cultural orientations with those I have researched. Therefore to be critical, may well entail being critical of myself, and I feel this may be ethically more acceptable than a 'strange' researcher coming in to criticise or question in some way, then departing again to his/her perhaps non-scrutinised private realms. If I am constrained by doing research in my home village more than a stranger would be, who could be sure of being away from the 'field site' when any work was published or made public, this raises interesting issues of what licence does being a stranger give a researcher, and is that licence ethically sound?

Privacy. The issue here is the differentiation between the public and private sphere and the consequent gathering and treatment of material in these differing settings. This kind of debate seems fraught with confusion and uncertainty mainly because private actions and private spaces are not straightforwardly congruent, and thus the latter cannot be relied up as a guide to what is private. Put simply, people can carry out very private acts in public, and visa versa. Also public and private cannot be seen as absolute terms. Some acts may be partially public, i.e., made within the confines of certain groups or places, perhaps the pub, and may be private to that public space. Therefore, there cannot be any formulaic approach to this issue. In my case, again, a similar process of judgement, as in issues of informed consent, is the only thing that can be applied. For example, I do report on a conversation held around a dinner table, which ostensibly was a private event, but the information offered in conversation was being projected into the public domain in terms of the people, some who were barely acquainted, present at the meal. But the key point is that I do not feel that the those present would 'really mind' if I reported what was said. This raises the point of whether research subjects should be given the opportunity to assess, comment on, change or even veto what eventually will be

written about them (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). This has its appeal, and may be a very useful technique in particular circumstances, but it is, in terms of the kind of participant observation carried out here, impractical, for if taken to a logical conclusion, everyone depicted or mentioned would have to be offered the opportunity to assess the work. This would be a potentially enormous and project swamping task.

Harm. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) begin their consideration of this issue by playing down its implications relative to other forms of research, in that the harm done may 'at the very least...create anxiety or worsen it', or have other more serious implications both through the process of the research and also through the subsequent publication of the work (p. 268). Cook and Crang (1995) In their consideration of the ethics of power in ethnography are more wary of the potential harm research can do. This is particularly so in the research of 'third world' 'exotic' scenarios, and they repeat Taussig's references to the potential usefulness of some ethnography to the CIA. In my case the more obvious concerns of harm, which are often associated with settings where there is a large differentiation in the power relations of researcher and researched, have little relevance. I am not researching the 'exotic' or (generally) the less powerful (please note that these issues concerning children are addressed separately at a later point). I actually think my research has had a number of positive but very small contributions to the village, in that it has encouraged people to consider aspects of children's lives in the village a bit more reflexively than they otherwise would have done. Perhaps there is a possibility of this research causing 'harm' in terms of Hammersley and Atkinson's criteria of anxiety or embarrassment, but interactions between people may do that anyway.

Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995) final two headings of ethical concern are **Exploitation** and **Consequences for Future Research.** To deal with the latter first, I do not think my research has 'spoilt the field' as, for example, some covert research may do in terms of breeding mistrust. As for the former, I feel again this is not a problem with my research. It may be exploitative, to a degree all research is, and to an extent I have consciously and probably unconsciously used the reservoir of community willingness within the village to gain access and interview time, but that is revealing in itself, and mostly exploitative of those who can afford it. Hardly

any act is pure, and the pursuit of ethically pure research through any systematic technique could replace the act of research itself if pursued to a (non-existent) conclusion. I think we have to live with this and, in a pragmatic sense, be concerned with degrees of betrayal, and degrees of ethics. We must be open, and operate in the collective judgement of the academic, (and beyond) community.

In the accounts that follow, all local place names and the names of people are changed. This essentially is intended try to ease some of the potential problems set out above, particularly privacy. It would not be hard for people in the village to work out who was who from reading the text, but total disguise is not possible or even desirable, and is not the main aim of this process. It is rather to provide a *degree* of privacy in terms of both within the village and for the village itself. This process could be seen as being complicated by the use of photographs and maps, but the ways in which they have been used (except for some instances of photographs of children) the same formula applies.

5.3 'INTERPRETING DATA'

Sue Jones (1985) wrote that ' a great deal more has been written about methodologies of qualitative data collecting than about those of data analysis. This is not particularly surprising. The analysis of qualitative data is a highly personal activity' (p. 56). Ten years later Cook and Crang (1995) wrote that ' in the geographic literature on qualitative methods, 'data coding' or 'transcript analysis' has tended to be conspicuous by its absence, forming only some 10% of all major accounts despite taking up at least as much time as fieldwork' (p. 65). So it seems things have not changed that much, but this may well be because it is such a difficult problem to address in a convincing way, particularly in formulaic, narrowly rationalistic and generalised ways. The research process is notoriously more messy than often acknowledged, and the interpretation of material gathered is not only a further layering of complexity and construction onto the research process, but is also the stage where all this has to be narrated into some form of coherent entity. Much of the contemporary challenge to research is dealing with such issues - dealing with the messiness and otherness of the world without at the same time circumscribing it.

5.3.1 Messiness and Otherness

The first point I want to make is that this sharp distinction in approaches to data construction and interpretation, although pragmatically natural, is in fact conceptually deceitful. Clearly there is, in one way, quite a clear split, in that at some point 'the data' will have been collected, and then the process of interpretation has to be addressed, and it may be at this point that one reaches for 'analysis' methodologies, (for example, Cook and Crang 1995, Bryman and Burgess, 1994; Silverman, 1993; Jones, 1985). But really the research process cannot be split so easily. In the design and execution of 'data collection' lies the beginnings of interpretation, and in the anticipation of interpretation lies the shaping of 'data construction'. A crude illustration of the latter point is that you would not use, for example, structured interviews if you were anticipating a very open, non directional, non focused, exploration of some social phenomena. Conversely if you do use some form of directing structure, then you have already started interpretation your through the specifics of such structure. Also in the process of data collection, certain techniques, particularly those such as semi-structured interviews, may well adjust and shift in emphasis, or take things up, or abandon things, as the research sequence runs; again interpretation is already starting within such a process. Finally, researchers of almost any hue, are bound to be engaging in some form of 'ad hoc' interpretation within the process of 'data collection'. Such a blurring between data collection and interpretation in qualitative research practice, both by 'formal' and 'informal' means is described by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p.205), who also point out that it is a key manoeuvre in Glaser and Strauss's grounded theory. Bryman and Burgess (1994) also report that data 'analysis', rather than being a separate phase, along with research design and data collection, 'are simultaneous and continuous processes' (217), and Babbie (1992) also suggests that such interaction between data collection and 'analysis' provides a desirable flexibility to such methods, (p. 302). Perhaps the main feeling as data are collected is one of confusion and uncertainty, or critical suspension and suspicion, (the messiness is being engaged with) but some points and themes will almost certainly stand out. If one is supposed to deny such, it is intriguing to consider how the subconscious, which is more or less not under our bidding, starts gelling forms out of the supposedly smooth data.

The sequence of research within this work is perhaps even more messy than the normal messiness of much research, especially that which entails a 'conventional period' in a field site. In such a sequence, the sharp spatial/temporal breaks which are the 'going to' and 'returning from' the site inevitably loom quite large in the research process. Preparations have to be done before hand, and as return trips to the site are often impossible, the leaving is critical also. In my case, my funding proposal was written knowing that I would most probably use my home village as a research site. As soon as I started thinking about the proposal I began to engage in low-level 'ad hoc' participant observation, both of the village 'as a whole' and of the families of which I have a high level of contact and familiarity. Alongside this has run the text based research which forms the content of Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, and other inputs throughout the rest of the work. Putting these together with the academic contexts already briefly considered, creates the field in which my research questions and methodologies were formed. But in the spirit of (trying to) let or get other voices into the text, as already discussed in principle, the interviews and observation were conducted as far as is possible to let the other answer, or even ask questions which I had not.

Once the consequences of such a process were assembled, the transcripts and observations notes, a similar process re-occurs when the texts are re-questioned, or re-researched, to listen out for the replies to the original questions, and also the other questions and points not initially prompted by me. Here there is a need for some careful and sensitive reading of the texts, for I am reaching for things I cannot initially see. This process, which is concerned with trying to enable narratives of otherness to emerge, - 'waiting for the rural other to call' as Philo (1997) (after Doel 1994) puts it, is critical yet challenging. Here what is being waited for is an 'emic' voice, a voice that is coming from the 'outside' into the research. But as Cook and Crang (1995) argue, after Agar (1980), the clear distinction between these 'emic' statements and 'the etic' (insider), statements, is doubtful, and inevitably the outsider voice, is, if nothing else, at least translated by the researcher and in the process the two types begin to merge. Cook and Crang seem to conclude that within a general framework of 'etic' coding of ethnographic data, which acknowledges the primacy of the researcher and research process, ideas of purely 'emic' coding should back a reflexive sensitivity to degrees, or shades, or fragments of it within the material.

Clearly, close and detailed readings of transcripts and notes are inevitable, otherwise why bother to collect them, and from that process, the complex and rigorous system of coding and cross-referencing which form interpretation methodologies, (which are outlined by Cook and Crang, 1995), seems to be an inevitable consequence. But here there appears to me some problems in how the texts are treated. Given the uncertainty which is now seen to be at the heart of research, and the compounding of this by the more prosaically, messy contingent aspects of it all, - for example, who you get to speak to, where; and the specifics of a research event; such as, moods, interactions, synergies, interruptions - the text gathered is itself inevitably contingent. (on another day it would been different). Also as I have argued elsewhere (Jones, 1995), lay discourse on any given subject an academic researcher may be investigating, may not consist of fully formed, coherent accounts of what a person may feel on a subject and therefore may be expressed differently on different occasions. For all these reasons, the text cannot be seen as sacrosanct, the be all and end all of the research process, but sometimes it seems as if the objectivity lost to the 'real world', reappears instead in the transcriptions of it. Thus the interpretation of these texts must be true to the texts, but more importantly true to the world that the texts stand in for and thus, imagination, flexibility and judgement must be shown in a process of indicative interpretation and narration.

5.3.2 Confirmations, Contradictions and Surprises

The position that I have arrived thus far is that transcription texts and notes from observation should be collided with my assumptions and the material which I have gathered in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, and the resulting confirmations, contradictions and surprises examined. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p. 210) imply, these are the basic strategies of ethnographic analysis, for it is 'patterns' 'surprises' and contradiction one is first sensitive to on a close reading of data transcripts. This may sound a bit undramatic and imprecise as a process, but as Babbie (1992) points out, 'as the most general guide, you look especially for *similarities* and dissimilarities. (that covers just about everything you are likely to see)' (P. 301, emphasis in original).

CONFIRMATIONS

In the analysis of my 'field work' material there is a lot of confirmation and development of the points raised in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. To an extent this is inevitable due to my inclusion of such points within my interview topics, and things looked out for in observation. But this I feel does not invalidate this approach for the following reasons. Firstly, I am functioning in the same broad cultural/social milieu as the adults I an interviewing, not only in terms of national cultures, but also local ones. I also share with them, age and gender aside, relatively similar positions in terms of class and ethnicity. The matters I am researching, or at least elements of them, have a high level of presence in lay and popular discourses in which I am similarly embroiled. Empirical confirmation (or contradiction) of more generalised, ungrounded theories and ideas, does, I feel, take analysis beyond the realms of self-fulfilling confirmation. This is also so for discursive confirmation, where the research subjects will take up a point and develop it and illustrate it with ideas and examples that I the researcher had no inkling of. The alacrity with which this often happened seemed to suggest that the ideas and examples *were already well* formed and therefore extant before the research intervention. It also important to note not only confirmations between my perceptions and ideas and those of the research subjects but also of confirmations which may arise between research subjects.

CONTRADICTIONS

In some instances contradictions between the case study material and my assumptions and the propositions set out in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 occurred. These were directly prompted by conflict with rather than confirmation of ideas as set out above. As such they empirically and discursively challenge these notions and thus expand and/or compound the overall conceptual framework being constructed. Also contradictions between differing research subjects accounts are sparks for further consideration, for these may be indicators of differing constructions and positions in the village.

I will briefly illustrate with some examples considered in later chapters. I have already said that popular constructions of country childhood idylls deploy powerful notions of the innocence of children and of nature, and essentially this was confirmed in the case study as indeed a powerful construction of childhood in the

village, which had quite marked effects upon how children are seen, and how their lives are structured. But alongside these are distinct conflicting sub-themes. One is that the innocence of country children may not be so desirable because they are out of touch with the harsher realities of the wider world. Another is that in terms of closeness to death and procreation in the natural/agricultural world, some children in the village are in fact in touch with the forces which traditionally are incompatible with innocence, yet they remain innocent. Thus through working these, and other ideas, in terms of confirmation and contradiction, complex conceptualisations can be constructed about the nature of adult constructions of childhood within the village, which are set within broader cultural contexts.

SURPRISES

> Ethnography is always about traversing the difference between the familiar and the strange. The ethnographer leaves her home (the familiar) and then travels to the other home (the strange), and then returns home to make sense of it in her writing.' (Grossberg, 1988, cited by Thrift and Pile 1995, p.20).

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) state that a sensitivity to surprise or puzzlement one encounters when going through transcriptions and field notes, should be a basic strategy for the process of analysis. These are the responses which are likely to be generated when the strange is encountered. During the interviews with adults, and observations, and the subsequent rereading of the transcriptions and notes, new ideas, surprises, and puzzlements - jolts to my established trajectories of thought - appeared (sometimes moments of unease or discomfort). These, which were neither confirmations or contradictions fell outside, and consequently again expanded the initially developed field of ideas, and, perhaps, could be seen as the 'other calling'. This sensitivity to surprise or 'puzzlement' has come through the research process, and equally clearly, much other otherness, could not get through such as system. As already considered in Chapter 1, there is concern within theory that the same can only really recognise and express itself, so perhaps this is the other same rather than the other coming through.

5.3.3 Quotes to Build Narrative: Quotes out of Context?

A perceived problem with 'data analysis' within qualitative research in general and ethnography in particular, is the tendency for the reams of notes and transcripts to be merely harvested for the best quotes which are pertinent, punchy or what ever, in relation to the interpretation being built by the researcher (Bryman, 1988) . This to

me not only is inevitable, but also if treated carefully, not a problem. If ethnographic or qualitative accounts claim that narratives built out of such moments was *the* life of some research subject, was *the* story, which could be told in no other way, we would be getting back to the idea of objective research acting as a mirror. This is where the ethnographies which Bryman (1988) reports on as problematic run into trouble. How, he asks, can it be that two qualitative researchers can look at the same field and come up with strongly different views of the 'real lives' they see there? The researcher/writer needs to acknowledge that the research account is a partial narrative, is a story built of selected bits, and it is being told this way because it seems to the writer that is what should be told about that situation, and that it is a very specialised, stylised rendition of (part of) a research subject's life, or whatever, whose real stories go way beyond what can be shown. To try and get these people into their 'own' stories, their voices are used where they clearly express some part of the narrative line as the research story, and if possible the line of the narrative is guided by these tellings. It is then up to the reader to judge how good the story is. Not in the sense of how true it is, but how useful and interesting it is. This is why openness is important, to allow effective judgement. To try and construct research accounts as tightly closed true accounts, is to deny the contingency and partiality of research, to inhibit its judgeability, and consequently it potential, or otherwise, usefulness.

DEALING WITH THE TRANSCRIPTIONS

Initially the technique used to deliver the above strategies was simply that of colour coding. Before beginning to read the notes and transcriptions a initial set of themes were set out and give a colour code. The transcripts were then read and marked in the appropriate colour. Immediately on reading the transcripts, through the processes of surprise, contradiction, new categories were 'opened' and given a colour. (The challenge is to find a set of felt pens with enough differing colours in them, one with 30 pens was eventually found to be sufficient). I feel this technique, which does not involve the commonly used 'cutting and pasting technique' (Bryman and Burgess 1994), overcomes the concern that some commentators feel, that this process has the effect of removing quotes from their interview contexts (ibid). I feel if all quotes about a certain topic are 'cut out' and assembled into a new text, this creates a power, clarity and certainty which belies the messier, subtly differentiated, blurred quality of the data.

To conclude, what this dissertation is about is essentially cultural constructions which manifest themselves in notions of the countryside being an idyll for childhood. It is concerned with both imaginary, popular, and powerfully articulated discourses and also local reworking and applications of such. This I argue has a powerful structuring influence on children's lives. Thus in the part of the research process set out above I have been attempting to reconstruct these conceptual narratives of childhood as they are spun around the lives of specific children in a specific place. Thus I have been exploring narrative themes which I have specified as being important, thus I have been sensitive to the language of these local narratives to the extent of watching out for key words and ideas such as innocence and nature. The contradictions and surprises, I hope, develop the range and complexity of these narrative and conceptual themes, and as they are now set out in the next chapter make a useful and resonant consideration of childhood in the countryside. But I stress these are not considered to be completely inclusive or conclusive.

CHAPTER 6

ALLSWELL: VIEWS OF THE CASE STUDY VILLAGE

This chapter is intended to serve as a brief introduction to Allswell[1] in order to orientate the reader and ground the subsequent parts of the dissertation. Initial descriptions of the location, and the physical, social and cultural make up of the place are given, along with some historical background. These are initial, and intended to provide no more than sketched overview, because more detailed descriptions and considerations of the village emerge throughout the remainder of the dissertation. Also within this section, the reasons for the selection of the village as a case study site which have not already been covered - the characteristics of the case study village itself, rather than the fact that it is my home village - are set out. In the second section (6.2) I then being to consider what makes the village 'tick' and how this ties in with other academic constructions of village dynamics, and how children may have a role in this process. In the last section (6.3), a form of landscape survey is given. This dissertation is about social/cultural and landscape interactions, particularly those of country childhoods, therefore both elements of this (perceived) relationship merit investigation. This is particularly so, for in the work of Shoard and Ward - which speaks for many of the other concerned voices about country childhood - it is the contemporary condition of landscape itself which is often seen to have jeopardised the potential for country childhoods to be fulfilled, through processes of intensification and over ordering which have eliminated the places of childhood. But there may be a case for saying that it is not simply the tidying up of the landscape which has caused a threat to country childhood idylls but also the tidying up of childhood, and/or the restriction of childhood, and/or the transformation of childhood.

[1] This is a fictionalised name. All other names of places, such as farms and other villages, and people have also been changed, with the exception of the county location and nearby major conurbations

6.1 ALLSWELL, THE CASE STUDY VILLAGE: LOCATIONS AND DIMENSIONS

The parish of Allswell is situated some 15 miles south-east of Bristol and 3 miles east of Bath in what was (up until April 1996) the County of Avon - now Bath and North East Somerset - in south-west England (fig 6.1).

The parish population was listed in 1995 as 250 persons (Wansdyke Council Year Book 1995/6). The village itself, (excluding an outlying hamlet of some 8 households), consists of 77 households with a population of approximately 214, 46 of whom are children, (aged under 18). (These figures are not exact because of the older 'children' who were dropping out of the category during the study period and becoming adults, and also at the same time, often leaving home to go to college or for other reasons, but who are at the same time beginning to appear on the register of electors as adults).

Of these 46 children, 34 are under sixteen and live at home. This high proportion of children in Allswell immediately challenges Ward's (1990) concern that the countryside 'has less children in it'. This not only gives the opportunity to study notions of country childhood idyll and their effects on children's worlds, but is also, I would suggest, a partial consequence of such discourses. The village seems to have reached a 'critical mass' in that families with children are attracted to it because of the number of other children already living there and the social structures that are built around them. (This is explored in more detail in the next chapter).

6.1.1 From Agricultural Labours to New Service Class

Up to the second world war the village consisted of thirty nine households and the seven farms situated in and around it which made it essentially an agriculturally dominated community; although there was some employment in the mines of the North Somerset coal field, with two neighbouring villages having pits at one time. The farms were formed at the end of the eighteenth century, on the break up of land owned by the Priory of Bath, but the farmstead sites, and that of Manor Farm, which was the successor to the 'Manor or Great Farm' of the village, date back to medieval times, and evidence of medieval field patterns have been recorded.

Fig 6.1 Regional location of Allswell in the county of Bath and North East Somerset, south-west England.

(Chapman, Bond and Green, 1991). Before the war, in the village, as Tom one life-long resident and farm labourer put it, 'everyone was, well 90% were farm labourers, 90% at least' (17.6)[2]. Since the war it has gradually transformed into a commuter village. Chris Smith the Chair of the Parish Council, who describes himself as 'the oldest newcomer in the village', having arrived in the village in 1947 as a young boy, said - 'I've seen it change completely, it is not the same place at all. There's no two ways about it, because it's all professional people (now)' (23.3).

It certainly reflects Thrift's (1987), and Cloke and Thrift's (1990) notion of a 'rural' populated by the 'service class'. Within those in full-time employment in the village, there are:- five company directors: two or three civil servants (MOD), marketing

[2] These figures refer to the interview number and page number of the interview transcript.

managers, solicitors, university lecturers, secondary school teachers, computer software designers/marketers, chartered accountants, chartered surveyors, builders, PR consultants: and one, printer, barrister, small business advisor, wine merchant, BT engineer, housing association manager, construction industry manager, product manager, graphic design consultant, IT consultant, sales retail supervisor, painter (artist), artist/crafter. The majority of these are the fathers and/or husbands of the households, but there are two or three where the female partner is the main wage earner, and five or six where both partners work either full-time or part- time. As well as these, a number of partners are involved in some form of part-time work, or running small businesses from home, both of which vary between quite full-time to more sporadic or occasional commitment. Within these, at least ten women in the village are either full-time or part-time teachers of one kind or another, and a further one is currently a very active chair of governors to one of the primary schools where some of the village children go. All but one of these have children, and a clue as to this concentration of teaching as a first/second job is that as an occupation, it fits in quite well with family time-tables imposed by school hours and school holidays. There are about six non working partners below retirement age, all but one being women.

Although still entirely surrounded by extensive tracts of agricultural landscape, agricultural activity has to a large degree retreated from the village itself, with all of the traditional farmyards within the village undergoing either partial or complete conversion to domestic dwellings (this is detailed and commented on later). Employment, or past employment, in agriculture has now shrunk to the three households of the last two village based farms, one ex farm labourer now employed elsewhere, one retired farmer, and one retired farmer/farm labourer (Walter), and one semi-retired farm labourer (Tom). There is now not one agricultural labourer living in the main village.

All this would make it a potentially prime target for those who have argued against the term rural having any remaining justification in the UK, or the South of England, or in the commuter belts rather than more remote areas (Thrift 1987), as considered in Chapter 3. It certainly comes into the first of Murdoch and Marsden's (1994) four type of rural space, the 'preserved countryside', which they argue, *contra* Thrift, *can* be identified within the 'vast created and manicured

urban/suburban space' which Thrift saw as replacing the (meaningful) rural in much of (lowland) southern England. But perhaps most importantly in defining Allswell as a rural, or country place, the village *is* considered to be rural in local lay discourses[3], or at least to embody most of the key characteristics of the English countryside idyll, which are now seen as key in terms of the production of certain rural spaces (Jones, 1995; Halfacree, 1993; Whatmore, 1993; Cloke and Milbourne, 1992; Crouch, 1992; Mormont, 1990). This view of the village as a rural, or country place, along with the presence of the children, significantly contributes to its relevance as a case study in the contexts of this dissertation, for here there is the opportunity to study the local mobilisation of popular constructions of country childhood idylls, and the structuring effect such have of the everyday lives of the children of the village.

The village feels very much occupied by families. Those with children of various ages still living at home, those with children who have recently left home and then a number of couples up to retirement age. There are about four single old age pensioners, a few childless couples, a few single/divorced people living alone. All the children under about sixteen and who are living at home are in families with both parents still in place. There are a few late teenagers who are living with one parent. Between them, the children under eleven go to five differing schools and the older children some six schools. Roughly half of each go to private school and some of the older ones board.

The village has expanded by about half in terms of households since 1949, the date of the first of the six council houses to be built. This expansion, has mainly ' in filled' between the original housing pattern which was quite scattered, and it has therefore not obliterated the basic scale and form of the village. The impact of these new households has been lessened in that eleven of them are converted agricultural buildings, (see fig 6.2) and another two have been generated by the division of two larger dwellings. In all only twenty-one houses have been built since the Second World War. Against this trend of expansion, something like five smaller dwellings have been lost though the process of converting two adjacent small terraced cottages into one house.

---

[3] This was ascertained in a smaller, earlier, separate study of Allswell. It was found that the majority of the residents saw it as rural, or at least a country village, and put great value on this understanding of the village, and in many cases took positive steps to construct the village in these terms.

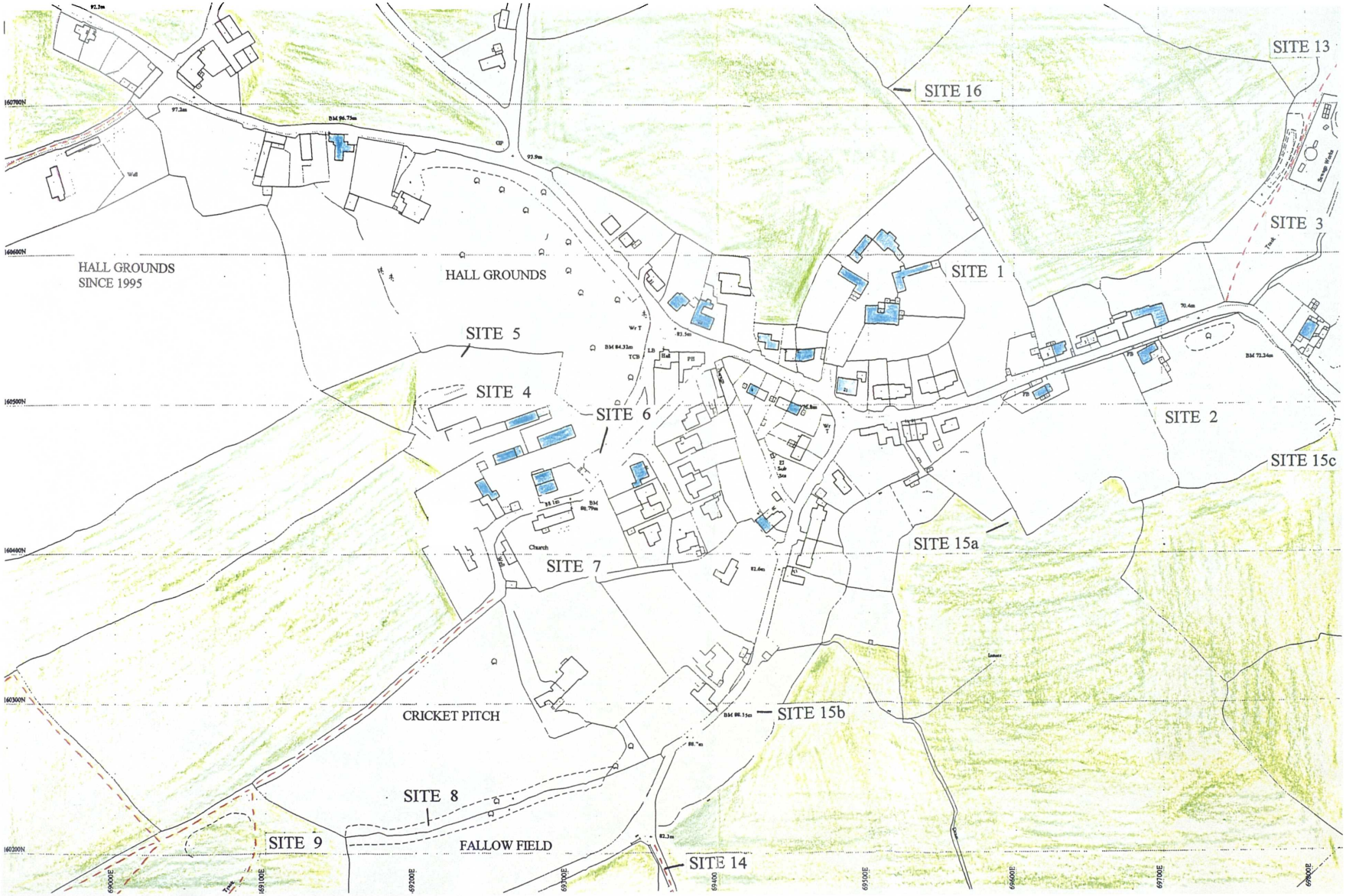


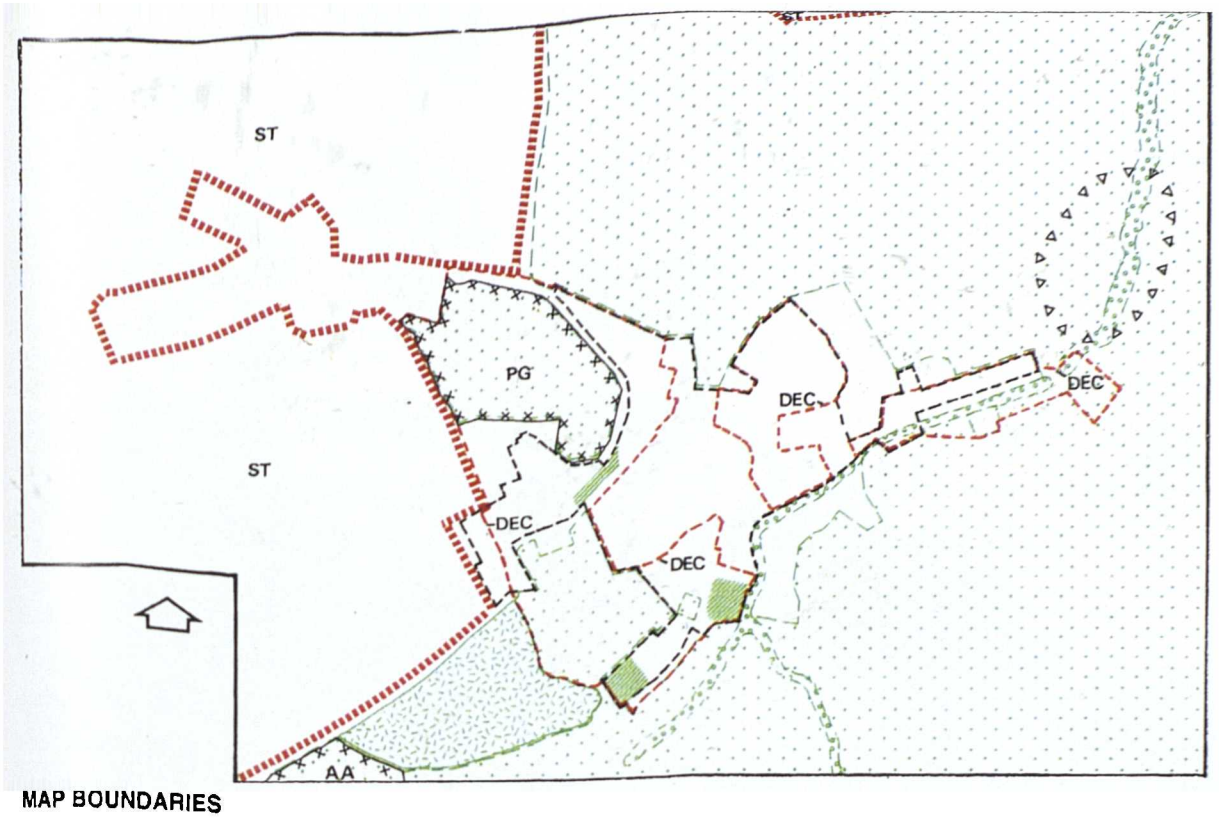
Fig 6.2 Map of Allswell. Showing:- Households with children (under 18) (blue); footpaths (red); intensively farmed land (green); location of sites considered in section 6.3; and some other features. (Adapted from map supplied by Bath and North East Somerset, 1997).

6.1.2 Views of the Village

Allswell is generally considered by residents and visitors to be a 'pretty village', the majority of houses being local stone built with either slate or pan-tile roofs. Some of the newer buildings are now considered slightly unfortunate in their use of render, fake stone or concrete block, and this is expressed by terms, of that was a 'sad' development or 'bad' piece of planning in numerous conversations. It is now rigorously protected by the planning authorities, by means of the local structure plan (fig 6.3), which amongst other things shows how the Housing Development Boundary, outside which new building would be opposed, is drawn very tight to existing developed areas and carefully protects the green spaces which break up the housing pattern. It also shows that within the village there are three designated Areas of Distinctive Environmental Character, which in effect cover the majority of the village.

The village is formed around three lanes which meet roughly at it's centre, houses either front onto these lanes or are in one of four 'cul-de-sacs', three of which are the result of the conversion of two farmyards for domestic dwelling and one, consisting of ten bungalows, which was a development carried out in the 1960s. A further small lane leads to the church, four houses beyond that, and on to the cricket pitch. This then turns into a green lane (fig 6.2) which is a bridle path and a main walking route out of the west end of the village and into the network of footpaths. (See fig 6.2). Fig 6.4 shows two aerial photographs of the village to give a further impression on the nature and layout of the village and surrounding land.

Allswell is best know for its mill, which is reputed to be one of the longest continually working water mills in the country. This mill is part of a farm complex which has been successfully developed as a farm conservation/visitor and function centre as well as continuing as a working farm. The mill and farm are actually sited a mile or so from the main body of the village down a narrow lane, and although it is very much part of the village in some respects, it's geographical separation does mean that the respective everyday lives of the mill and the village are quite separated and consequently Mill Farm and its three houses do not feature very prominently in this study. The descriptions here are of the main body of the village, mostly ignoring the mill and another outlying farm.



MAP BOUNDARIES

Boundary of Local Plan

Boundary of Inset

ST Special Tree Planting Area

Area of Local Landscape / Nature Conservation Interest

Site of Nature Conservation Importance

SI Site of Special Scientific Interest

CULTURAL HERITAGE

CA Conservation Area

DEC Area of Distinctive Environmental Character

Open Area of Amenity Value

AA Site of Particular Importance for Archaeology

PG Park or Garden of Historic Interest

HOUSING

Housing Development Boundary

RECREATION, LEISURE & TOURISM

Land of Recreational Value

Fig 6.3 1995 Local Authority Local Plan of Allswell, showing housing development boundary and nature conservation and heritage designations (Adapted from Wansdyke Local Plan 1995).

Fig 6.4 Aerial photographs of Allswell looking north (top) and south-east.

The road network of country lanes on which the village lies is highly significant to its material development and social/cultural construction. Although close to Bath, and to a lesser extent Bristol and Keynsham, the lanes to the village are narrow, winding, and are not routes for any significant through traffic. This makes the village feel more 'rural', 'isolated' and peaceful than other villages nearby which are dissected by main roads. The lanes, as fig 6.5 shows, wind through intensively farmed, though still attractive countryside, which retains hedgerows, single trees and small patches of deciduous woodland. The village is set in a small valley, and could be said to 'nestle' in the best traditions of rural idyll imagery (fig 6.6). It has a

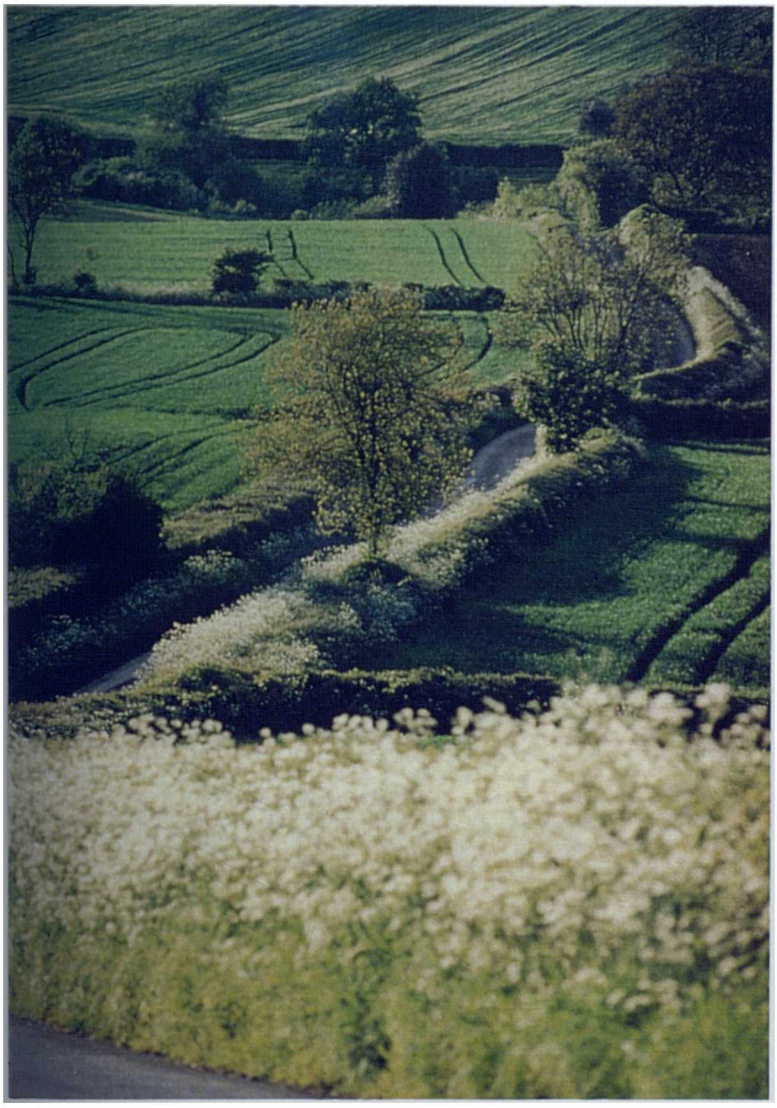


Fig 6.5 View of the lane approaching Allswell from the north-west.

Fig 6.6 View of Allswell from lane approaching the village from the east.

number of large mature trees, particularly ash and horse chestnut, many of which are in the grounds of the two 'big' houses - the Hall and the Rectory. The churchyard also has a number of significant trees, particularly one huge horse chestnut and the ubiquitous and suitably venerable yew tree. A populous and raucous colony of jackdaws occupy the trees around the church yard and nest in the louvers of the belfry. There is a stream which runs along the main street for a while then diverts through some back gardens and then out into farmland at either end of the village. This threatens a few house with flooding in the winter, but dries up for large periods of time in the summer, and this has caused some critical questioning on the fate of the stream as it runs through the valley where the landowner has made two ponds.

Allswell feels quite 'blessed' by nature. In the past the village has been selected by local RSPB enthusiasts as a bird ringing and survey site because of its richness in bird life. This year (1996) Amanda and her two children, took part in the RSPB nation-wide bird population survey, spending two hours recording all the birds which visited their garden, which turned out to be 'a lot' both in terms of species, and overall numbers. But Walter swears that the marked increase in pet cats in the village has had a deleterious effect on the bird life. Buzzards and kestrels are

common sights and sparrow hawks (one ate a collar dove on Amanda's and John lawn the other day), and various owls (tawny, barn, and little) can more rarely be glimpsed in the surrounding woods, fields, and lanes, or more readily be identified by their calls. The stream is regularly visited by herons, and sometimes kingfishers, and for three summer months last year became the home of a white egret, a rarity which caused some excitement. The surrounding farmland is also quite rich in terrestrial wildlife, with a lot of deer, hares and badgers. Most people will have encountered these in the lanes at some point or other. Two of the farms with land around the village have won FWAG conservation awards for the environmentally sympathetic management of their farming practices. This has included the planting of a number of trees in various places around the edges of the village, which, in part is designated as a Special Tree Planting Area in the District Authority Nature Conservation and Wildlife Strategy (Wansdyke 1995). The stream and valley which lead away from either end of the village are also classified under the same strategy as County Sites of Nature Conservation Importance, and these are in turn linked into a designated regional network of Wildlife Corridors, and are joined by a corridor running through the south-west fringe of the village (ibid). (See fig 6.3).
At either end of the village, footpaths follow the stream through the farmland for some distance, one leading to the mill, the other eventually to another lane and to the next village. Others radiate from the village in different directions (fig 6.2). The parish council has a footpath representative, and a map of these rights of way are one of the few things constantly on the village notice board.

6.1.3 Services, Organisations and Events

The public facilities in the village consist of a pub, a small garage, and village hall - all set by a tiny 'village green'. Up the lane from there is the church, cricket pitch and pavilion. There is also a small sewage works, discretely tucked away down wind, stream and valley and completely concealed by trees. The village school, now the village hall, closed in 1970, the village post office and shop (now a house) and another pub, closed in the mid sixties. A small bakery and forge are more distant memories. The village is served by local authority mobile library service and a bus service which provided two return journeys to Bath a week. Milk is delivered on three days of the week, a fish van visits on Fridays. The post arrives between 10.30 and 11.30, there is no mains gas, the electricity supply and phone lines seem to us to be very susceptible to breakdown, especially during extreme weather.

Considering its relatively small population Allswell has a quite startling (and revealing) number of groups and events which are, in some way or other, in the public, or community domain. These take on various forms, scales and patterns. Below they are listed and briefly described. I have grouped them under Church; Cricket Club; Parish Council/Village Hall Committee; and Pub; these being the four main foci and initiators of events and structured social patterns within the village.

The Church shares a vicar with a neighbouring, larger parish where he resides. Normally two services every Sunday are held, with two morning services per month being a children's service and one other being followed by a Sunday School in the village hall. This is quite a *new development and reflects both the numbers of* children in the village and desires for the village to be a community in childhood terms. For 'normal' services the average congregation ranges between 10- 20, but on occasions has been known to drop to 1. For the children's service, perhaps 14 children may attend ranging in age from 4 to mid teens, with 7 or 8 of the younger ones going on to the Sunday School afterwards. On special occasions, such as Christmas and Easter the church is full. The church organises a number of yearly events:- harvest supper; barn dance, alpine fair; flower festival and concert; coffee morning and bring and buy stalls; and carol singing. It also has a bell ringing group who practice every Tuesday evening as well as ringing for all the services. The church, due to the small congregation sizes, has briefly teetered on the brink of financial unsustainability, with the Church of England administration saying it could not support the running costs beyond a certain limit. A special 'use it or loose it' (or at least contribute to it even if you don't use it), type appeal was made in the parish magazine, and this, along with new fund raising initiatives, such as the alpine fair evening, and the yearly held patronal gift day, has for the time being at least, lifted this threat. Neither I, or my immediate family, attend the church or Sunday School, but I/we do attend some of the events, both for social and giving support reasons, and a number of other people adopt this position. There are a number of reasons for this, what could be termed, secular support of the church. Firstly it is recognised that the church is one of the few village institutions that still operates on any meaningful level and plays an important community role. Secondly I feel that there is an aesthetic drive to support the church, in that it is a quintessential icon of the rural/village tradition. Thirdly, The Church is charming building, but if it were closed

and unused, it would pose considerable logistic, symbolic and aesthetic problems to the village.

The Cricket Club was founded in 1986 and has flourished. It has turned a rented field into a reasonable ground and in 1993 built a small pavilion which, with a grant from the Sports and Arts Fund, was last year connected to mains water and electricity. The club has a membership and squad of about 25. Only past and present residents and their relations can play for the village, although this rule is stretched to accommodate a few quasi-villagers. The team had thirty-three fixtures arranged for 1996; goes on an annual long weekend tour, and sometimes a club trip to a test match is arranged. In the winter nets are held every Thursday evening, to which on average twelve or so players will turn up. For home matches teas are provided, some 'mums' and children often attend, and other residents drop in, turning them into a social event. A 'youth cricket' scheme has been run over the last two years, encouraging children form six upwards, (of both sexes) to come to a weekly summer evening fun practice. For the purposes of fund raising and/or socialising the club organises a number of annual events which include; a party and bar-b-que; duck race; quiz night; dinner/dance; and bonfire night. I am an 'occasional player' having played about six games in the last two years, I have not (yet) attended nets, or gone on the tour, but I and/or my partner have attended most of the annual events. Again some others are in a similar position to this.

The pub is very much a local. It does not serve food or pander to the pressurised commercialisation of pub culture as practised by the big brewery chains. Consequently its lunch time trade is very small and it now does not open in the middle of the day on three days of the week. It never gets packed, apart from events nights, but can be quite busy on weekend evenings. Due to the landlords interest, the pub is a centre for steam enthusiasts and consequently there are three 'steam nights' held each year when steam traction engines and other vintage vehicles and machines are exhibited outside the pub (fig 6.7). The pub also is involved in skittles (it has a skittle ally) and shove ha'penny leagues. It is the 'spiritual home' of the cricket team, being both the pre and post match venue, and site of the team and club notice board. As a weekly regular in the pub I have

observed that a substantial proportion of the village either do not use it at all, or only very infrequently, while those who do so, tend to on regular weekly, or even nightly basis.

The two main bodies are the parish council, of which I am a member, and the village hall committee. Through these along with close co-ordination with both the church and the cricket club, who sometimes benefit from the funds raised, two annual 'flagship' events are organised. These are the May Day Fete (fig 6.8) and the Village Social (fig 6.9). In both these cases a significant proportion of the village becomes involved, both in terms of organisation but particularly in attendance. Both also attract people from beyond the village, especially the May Day Fete, which has something of a local reputation, and is covered by the local press (Fig 6.10). The village hall is also the site of the Monday morning toddlers group, which attracts parents, (predominately mothers, I have attended a few times), with young children from the village and beyond. These, and other events and their implications in terms of the children in the village considered in more detail in subsequent sections).

Other groups include:- The Allswell Morris Men, who are major feature of the May Day Fete and Village Social, and also dance to greet the midsummer dawn on Wellsdon Common and at other local functions - The Glee Club, a newly formed singing group, who gave their first performance at the Church's Flower Festival concert in a marquee on the vicarage lawn. Five-a-Side Football group, (Sunday *evenings, winter only). - Baby Sitting Circle, which consists of 13 families* from within and beyond the village at present, of which we are one. This works on a token system but tends to be fragmented into mostly geographical sub-groups who do 'swaps' or use each other on a regular basis. - 'The Link', the parish magazine, which is produced jointly with two neighbouring parishes. - 'Dust Busters', this consists of a group of younger teenagers who offer their services as baby sitters, car washers, leaf sweepers, and other such tasks at the rate of two pounds per hour. The village hall has been the venue for a regular keep fit session and art class. The latter, which is now held in the neighbouring village at the organiser's house, still has an annual exhibition in the village hall, where scenes of the village painted by residents and people drawn to the class from neighbouring villages can be seen and purchased.

Fig 6.7 Early evening at the steam night outside the pub.

Fig 6.8 Scenes from the 1995 May Day Fete.

Fig 6.9 Scenes from The 1995 and 1996 Village Social. Socialising (top), and the Morris Men's 'turn' on stage.

Somerset Guardian

No 5,875 THURSDAY, MAY 9, 1996 45p

NORTON HILL SCHOOL NEWS AND PICTURES, PAGES 6,7

The start of the Jog, a 1 mile race around the village.

Sam Barclay, Robert Brown and Jonathan West painted their faces with the words. May Day. Pictures: Will Nicol

Maytime menu

A TRADITIONAL English summer menu of Morris dancing, skipping round the Maypole, a silver band on the village green and daft sports in the gardens of the Manor House was served up at on Bank Holiday Monday.

Villagers first started celebrating Mayday in 1977, the Queen's Silver Jubilee Year, by reviving all the old traditional dances and founding the Jubilee Morris Men.

The dancers are still dancing, and this year they shared their dancing ground in the vil-

lage centre with the Somerset Maids dancers and schoolchildren with their Maypole.

While the dancers caught their breath between turns, Norton-Radstock Silver Band kept the music going with traditional airs. In the Village Hall, the building which will get the benefit of money raised from the Mayday celebration, there were delicious teas, and outside barbecues and bars were kept busy all day.

Up in the grounds of the Manor House there were sack races, potato races and three-legged races, plus a treacherous greasy pole where pillow fights took place, and an egg-throwing contest

Fig 6.10 Coverage of Allswell's May Day Fete - front page - local press. The text goes - 'A traditional English summer menu of Morris Dancing, skipping around the Maypole, a silver band on the village green and daft sports in the garden of the Hall was served up at Allswell on bank holiday Monday'. Note the prominence given to children in the coverage.(Your researcher is second from the right in the photograph of the start of the Allswell jog).

Chris Smith is the unofficial historian of the village, who says he started collecting material 'when he was eight', and has given occasional talks on the village's and surrounding area's local history, drawing upon a considerable archive of photographs and other memorabilia. These, reflecting the interest the village has in itself, were 'sold out' and an extra showing was arranged.

There are numerous overlaps in these village groups both in terms of persons who attend them and in organisational terms, for example the Bell Ringers always do one of the set piece 'turns' at the village social, and the cricket club run stalls on the pub's steam nights. Each group or event has one or more key personalities, some of whom are key in more than one setting, for example the church and the Cricket

club, while others are much more based in either one or the other. The key personalities which span groups are important in creating links between them. But it is not only through the organising and running village events or bodies that key personalities emerge. Walter (retired farmer/labourer, long term resident) and Tom (semi-retired farm labourer, life long resident), are key symbolic figures. One lives (not alone) in a mobile home, the other in a cottage tied to Mill Farm were he has worked since he was fourteen. They both are acknowledged by (nearly) all, and are regulars in the pub, one having his name above his regular seat, and both having their own glass/tankards. These two have, amongst other pub routines, a regular Friday lunch-time gathering with other longer established local farmers and others. In both, but Walter particularly, lies a strong relic of a local accent, which some confused and crestfallen newcomers find at first, quite difficult to follow. My father, also a (mostly) retired farmer, who has been resident in the village since 1982 is key in a differing way in that he gardens a large vegetable patch which lies alongside the lane leading to the church. This, as well as being the source of produce given to many people in the village, and a site for some local children to 'raid' for raspberries, and pick gooseberries etc., has been designated under the latest planning strategy document, as a 'Open Area of Amenity Value' due to the contribution it makes to the village scene.

There are also a number of quasi structures, which span between domestic and public spheres. Friday night in the pub has at least four regular groups whom occupy differing areas of the bar. I, my partner, and all but one of the adults from 5 neighbouring houses, form one such group. The routine here, (roughly, for it is often broken by some absenteeism), for all bar one of the couples whose children are beyond baby-sitting age, is that the 'girls' go down the pub from 9-10 PM and the 'boys' from 10-11 PM. (The problem here is that the former invariably break the contract and do not return till around 10.30 (ish) or worse, and we (the 'boys') then rush down, but this is somewhat ameliorated by the apparent unreliability of the bar clock). Another Friday night set consists partly of fathers with younger children whose partners stay at home, (but will appear in the pub at other times, sometimes with children just after a cricket match). Another group, predominantly male, which has a some overlaps with the other groups, and also a geographical weighting to one end of the village, gather for a Sunday evening drink, this is now subsumed into the (new) winter five-a-side football routine, of which I am a regular attendee.

There is an occasional series of 'girl's nights' when one of a group of the village women, when her partner is away or out, will invite the others around for the evening. There is also an on-going round of children's birthday parties, which sometimes use the village hall or are otherwise at home, but these also show some patterns of uneveness as to who is invited.

As I recounted in the previous chapter my research in the village is unevenly enmeshed with my life in the village and varied in degrees of participation and observation. The accounts I have just given above are basically reflected observations of, mostly, unreflective participation in aspects of village life. (The material in the next chapters are mostly drawn for my deliberately initiated participant observation). I am aware that these accounts are quite narrative empiricist in nature, with only brief incursions of reflexive 'analysis', but the aim *is* to provide a narrative of some of the empirical circumstances within which subsequent more critical considerations can occur. Essentially these accounts are meant to place the village within the contexts of popular constructions of the rural and rural idyll, that to many, are familiar enough to resonate around these accounts. Having said that I feel the above views of groups in the village does warrant some critical reflection. What these show is that although the village is now a predominantly middle class space, it does exhibit quite a wide variety of constructions of social life in general and rural social life in particular. Such variation often forms around different intersections with other powerful cultural constructions. Here I take gender as a brief example. The differing habits of the pub going groups described above reflect complex intersections of notions of traditional rural community, with it's pub and family icons, and changing gender relations in certain sectors of society.

Events such as May Day, harvest supper, carol singing, village 'panto' ('social' in this case) are seen as emblematic of rural community, and often are the focus of views of 'country village life', like the one I have just given, but also in many popular accounts of rural life. They are images of the community clearly and literally 'being together'. This has the tendency to create an idea of community which is a series of events. But there are large spaces around and between these events, and also not everyone 'gets involved'. A more representative photograph of the 'green' outside the pub, would not find it thronged with people attending one or other of the events, but rather empty and quiet. Perhaps it could be said that in the past when rural

communities were closed (Harper, 1987), events were essentially the *outcome* of those communities, whereas now the same kind of events, maintained through tradition carried by popular discourses, become the *producers* of community.

The village, like elsewhere, has daily, weekly, and seasonal rhythms and cycles. On week days there is a (very) mini rush hour, as commuters, then the school runs head out the village. Then it is quiet, and the main street often empty of people and traffic. There are a few people around, but not many. On the weekends, in the summer there is the hum of lawn mowers, smell of grass. The village is a highly gardened place. In the school holidays children are around, but also often disappear on long holidays, (which made this apparent prime spot for research more problematic).

Allswell is considered to be a peaceful and tranquil place, and this is a key part of it being seen as 'rural' or part of the country idyll. - along with ideas of small community, and the presence of agriculture and nature. It is possible to have an 'Adlestrop' moment[4] in Allswell, as I sometimes have; when your alone, perhaps in your garden on a hot still day , and you realise that all you can hear is receding layers of various bird song. Given the retreat of agriculture from the village itself, the loss of the school and the shop, it is perhaps more 'tranquil' than ever before, to the point of being a 'dead zone' as Patrick Wright (Guardian, 16 AUG 1994) termed the contemporary (commuter) English village. But this is not how the majority of the residents would see it. In the summer the peace is sometimes and excitingly disturbed by the sporadic but sometimes quite frequent passage of military air craft on (very) low level training flights (a sure sign of rurality!), and also the landing of one of the many hot air balloons which pass over the village. On a number of occasions Jack and Ruby, Sam and I have guided retrieval vehicles to the landing sight, the children getting the excitement of the free ride across the field and the adults the courtesy bottle of wine or whisky the crew carry to thank the landing site's owner.

[4] An 'Adlestrop' moment is what I call a moment when you become aware, first of stillness and of (country) silence, and then what is in it. It is after Edward Thomas's poem of that name, in which he recalls a momentary pause on a hot summer's day - 'And for that moment a blackbird sang/Close by, and round him, mistier,/Farther and farther, all the birds of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire'. (1964, p. 48).

6.1.4 'Perfect Allswell'

In the summer outside the pub, hikers, and cyclists, bearing maps often appear, along with the occasional visitors to see the Church, so Allswell is a minor tourist space and this enhances the reputation of being a desirable place. Indeed the village does have a reputation for seeing itself as such. One research subject (resident for about two years) told me,

> Well we spent some time over in Crumpton (a neighbouring village) with various people, and they call Allswell people, 'perfect Allswellites' *(oh really?)*. Which I said, 'oh what's that all about' and, er, its a perception from other villages, and other areas, they um, you know, Allswell is perfect, and that the people of Allswell, you know, think that it is perfect, and that it is, you know, a cut above as it were. Which I thought was very interesting. I mean that really did make me smile (13.18).

Such sentiments were also considered at a dinner party which I and my partner attended. Here the consensus between the three couples (including us) was that Allswell is perfect because it is not perfect. It is not as intensely picturesque as some of the more famous villages a bit further east, some of which are in the Cotswolds ANOB. It thus is perhaps as idyllic as it can be without attracting the pressures that these other villages face in terms of visitors, tourist development and house prices. (This is not to say that the house prices in the village are low).

Perhaps matching Allswell's notion of itself, the Church has a famously large and splendid weather cock. The village also boasts an accomplished and increasingly successful artist who has in her folio of major works, views of the village, two of which have be turned into cards (fig 6.11), and who has also painted on commission views of people's houses which now hang in those houses. It is appropriate and indicative that the content and style of these pictures is one of impressionistic images of idyll. The overriding conclusion is that most people feel very positive about living in Allswell, that they do see it as fulfilling at least some or many of the criteria which go to make up the notion of 'rural idyll' and a significant part of that revolves around it as a place in which to bring up children.

6.2 'LIKEMINDEDNESS'

One respondent, (resident in the village for about four years at the time of interview), commented that 'it's quite a natural village, you know, with the "social" and everything else, the church and the cricket club.' (14.7). By 'natural' I think what was meant is that it is a 'real' village, it is seen as an actual community, and the

Fig. 6.11 Views of Allswell by the painter Ann Parkin.

community in this case *is* represented by events and organisations. I think Jenny Agg's (1996) notion of 'likemindedness'[5] (more detail of this concept features below), is a effective way of summing up the driving force behind these constructions of community and village life in Allswell, and I would like to develop it in two ways[6].

6.2.1 Villagers to differing degrees

Firstly, my suggestion is that the 'villagers' in Allswell deploy differing degrees of likemindedness. Some villagers are, in a way, part-time villagers, in that they only get involved sporadically and selectively. Others are 'villagers plus', in that they play a quite active and full life in the village, but also maintain contacts and networks beyond the village, these are often those who are key personalities within one or more of the structures listed above, but are also involved in extensive professional, social, and family networks beyond the village. Having said above that there is 'space' around the events outlined above, and thus the village as 'obvious community' is intermittent, I would like to qualify this by saying that at times the village seems very busy at being a village, and this is where the 'villagers-plus' become visible. This can be illustrated by four days in the life of one key personality, (a barrister who works in Bristol), who is involved in the church, cricket club, Glee Club, and other networks. On one Thursday evening, after work, he mows the Churchyard in preparation for the coming weekend's Flower Festival. On Friday evening, he helps provision and run the cricket club's hot-dog stall at the pub's steam night. On Saturday afternoon, he brings his son to an away cricket match being played some twenty minutes drive from the village. One of our players (I was playing) has not turned up so he stands in and plays, bowling fifteen or so (quite effective) overs. At five he had to quit the cricket match, which by then he was 'quite into', because he was singing in the Glee Club's performance at that evening's Flower Festival concert. On Sunday he spent time on duty in the church which was open for visitors to see the flower displays. (The next weekend he was, again,

---

[5] In Agg's (1996) research into the constructions of meaning village communities build for themselves the term 'likeminded' emerged from the research subjects themselves, and Agg adopts this as to represent the collective constructions of meanings she was encountering.

[6] This is not to say that Agg does not develop this concept effectively, but at present her research is still being written up and not readily accessible apart from the draft of a conference paper used here as reference.

cooking sausages at the cricket club bar-b-que, and also selling raffle tickets and announcing the raffle draw on stage). The part-time villagers, such as myself, would have helped at and/or attended perhaps one or two of these events, and would not be so prominent in their preparation or planning.

Other villagers, particularly the older, long term residents, some of whom do not have cars, are more 'complete' villagers. These are the last representatives of the time when the village was a closed community, and everyone knew everyone else. I have already introduced Walter and Tom, two long term residents who really belong to this category, but there are others of whom the chairman of the parish council said 'I feel sorry for people like Olive and so on, they are very isolated now, really' (23.1). (Significantly Olive does not go to the pub, the only readily available meeting space for those without easy access to transport in the village, and the venue of much of Walter's and Tom's socialising. This may well be a gender based difference derived from (past?) attitudes surrounding gender and pubs). The difficulty for these (isolated) 'complete' villagers shows how it is in fact a much more fragmented and intermittent community than it once was. But for the other (intermittent) villagers, they see it when its being a village, and are doing other things in between times and either don't worry, notice, or care whether the village is functioning in their absence. A few others are non (community) villagers, although they might be villagers in the sense of partaking in its aesthetics, isolation, or quietness, (it is difficult to get to this group who do not participate through a research process of participant observation). Therefore likemindedness within the village is uneven in application by differing people. Some only actively perform it when they are in 'village mode' which may be quite infrequently.

I am not the first to attempt to classify villagers into types. Harper (1987) identified, 'centred', 'partially-centred' and 'non-centred' villagers; whereas Bell (1994), identified villagers under the categories of 'localism', 'ruralism', 'countryism', and 'communalism'. My classification is not intended to completely usurp these, the differences between these classifications stem in part from the orientation of the initial research approach, and each perspective may have a relevance to understanding village structures. There are though links between them, for example Harper's 'centred' villagers would correspond to my 'complete' villagers, and my 'villagers plus' would fit into Bell's 'communalism', which is based on a person's

commitment and contribution to the mechanisms and structures of village life. What would be interesting, (but a bit of a tangent for this work) would be to see how these classifications cross cut with each other, and with other categorisations, notably incomers/locals and class. For example, professional incomers, who fall into village life, can be said to be both centred and non-centred in Harper's terms. Likemindedness has a very powerful role to play in all this. In my experience of Allswell, when a new family moves in, there is almost a rush to recruit them socially, and wily events organisers will hit them with requests in the hope of the newcomers either being keen to join in or too uncertain to refuse . They are assumed to be likeminded, (after all they have chosen to come to the village), and can become assimilated into village life incredibly quickly, or more accurately, sections of village life. (Although the village sees itself as functioning as a village, on a day to day basis this is divided up into a number of sub groups, based around family or close friend links, common schools, or purely the proximity of houses, and thus the converted barn complexes have a significant role here). Only a display of hostility to this process, or a high degree of non-likemindedness in some form or other, will break or slow this process.

6.2.2 Partial Likemindedness

The other development of likemindedness, is a kind of partial likemindedness which allows quite disparate groups and individuals, who might not be drawn to each other, or might even find themselves in conflict over many issues, to meet on the common ground of likemindedness over the village, and for the sake of that repress the areas of difference which may cause difficulty if given the chance. Agg (1996) found this in her focus groups where in discussions over the village's identify and meaning, people were

> reluctant to claim different points of view, or to express opinions dogmatically. The perpetuation of consensus, membership of likemindedness, meant a discussion would ensue, yet a collective and simplified conclusion would result, with a general level of agreement not displayed within previous comment (p. 11).

Certainly there is contention even within the likemindedness over the village of Allswell, but popular iconic views of the English rural village idyll are strongly and quite clearly defined within our national culture, and these provide areas of relatively common ground for these disparate groups to be likeminded over. To illustrate with the presence of the church within the village; I, my partner, and at least three of my friends and neighbours are more or less expressly atheist, and to varying degrees

generally hostile to institutionalised religion, yet we feel, to varying degrees, that the Church has a place in the context of the village, not only in a community sense but also even in aesthetic terms, as I have already considered. Thus we all, to varying degrees, help out at some events which raise funds for the church, particularly the May Day Fete and the village social, and also attend events to give social and financial support. Another villager, and quite a prominent helper at such events, has joked that she is catholic and should not be working to further the 'rival organisation', but clearly sees the village as the main focus of the events. Similarly, the cricket club, although joined, helped, and contributed to with a varying degrees of enthusiasm, is generally accepted as part of the village scene, and even some of those with 'zero interest' in sport will ask 'how did you get on?'. Teas are generally produced by the women of the village, some of whom, I think, would publicly question such gender roles, if it were not for the fact that they have decided not to rock the village boat. Many other grounds for collective partial likemindedness exist, be it attitudes to trees within the village, to ideas on what is appropriate building material, and what sort of events and event components are suitable for the village. Critically, for the implications of this work, I feel children are another key area of likemindedness within the village. Again, I stress, that this is not without internal differences and dissidents, but there is a powerful suite of common understandings about 'the village children'. And this could be seen as symbolised by the 'village children' dancing around the May Pole which is one of the key features at the May Day Fete, and also the village children performing at the village Social. These issues are explored in more detail in subsequent sections.

6.3 ENVISIONING ALLSWELL'S (POTENTIAL) CHILDHOOD LANDSCAPES

Having introduced Allswell in a social/cultural sense I now want to go some way towards introducing the landscape itself, or rather certain places within it. This next section is based on my (participant) observation of the landscapes of Allswell, (and if encountered, people within them), constructed through the walks already considered in Chapter 5. As set out in Chapter 2 country childhood idylls are very much about children interacting in/with certain spaces in certain ways; and in Chapter 3 the critical discourses which challenge these views are in part often based on arguments about the loss of these sorts of spaces and/or access to them, and in the case of Shoard she feels that changes to the countryside have had a far

reaching and deleterious effect on (country) childhoods. Thus my research does not just need to have a relationship with the population of the village but also with the landscape itself.

The point I want to make here is relatively straight-forward in that it questions the extent to which (rural) landscapes have been tidied up to the point of denying children spaces to play. As set out in Chapter 3, Ward's (1990) concern - which is also reiterated by Philo (1992), and paralleled by others, such as the National Children's Play and Recreation Unit (1992) - is that the countryside has been tided up to the extent that there are few places remaining for children to play in. My contention is that in and around Allswell at least, this is by no means a straight forward conclusion to make. Also to generalise beyond the case study site, I would say that such concerns are *over estimating the ability, necessity and even desire of capital and ideological forces to homogenise environments to the extent that all forms of 'other' spaces are eradicated.* Although to be fair to Ward he did regionalise his concern to the Eastern counties of the UK which he is most familiar with, and Burton (1993) suggests that in considering children's access to play space in the countryside, it may well be important to distinguish between 'the rural areas dominated by intensive farming - the prairie lands of East Anglia, for example - and those parts where there is easy access to a relatively unspoilt environment' (p.27).

It is probably too simplistic to put all the weight of changes in childhood landscape interactions onto changes to the landscape itself, and again Ward is sensitive to such issues and does explore changes in childhood as well as landscape, but Shoard (1980), whose approach is centred around concern over various effects of changes to the countryside, does make this quite straight forward connection. (As quoted in Chapter 3 she states that the 'devastation' wrought on the countryside, has already 'changed the experience of childhood in England substantially' (p. 193).

As I have already set out, there is much concern over the shifting status and condition of childhood; both in how it is lived and how it is controlled; and it may be these changes, rather than those to the countryside which are more significant in the changing interactions between childhood and environment. It may be childhood itself which is being tidied away, or constrained through parental and child fear. Although Allswell is considered to be an (relative to urban) idyll, and does fulfil much

of the popular image of country childhood idyll, I do not think that the children of the village, en masse, (although there is considerable variation between children in this), live out the country childhood idyll to the degree that exists in popular imagination, or that possibly did exist for earlier generations. (This is not to say that they are *necessarily* worse off, but rather that the lives of children today are, in some ways, substantially different).

The purpose of this next section is to provide a indicative landscape survey of a number of places in and around Allswell, (to do a comprehensive one would be beyond the scale possible here). This will show that there are in fact a number of sites which are places, or appear to be potential places, in which country childhoods can/could unfold. It has also struck me that it is very easy to see it as a landscape on which adult fictional constructions of a country childhood adventure idyll could be based. In other words it appears (to me) to be a landscape, where children could, and to a degree do, find their own spaces, and also one in which William and the Outlaws, or the Famous Five, could easily be placed in.

In what follows twenty-one places, or sites, are considered. They vary from single trees to whole fields, and their locations range from within the village itself to more remote sites a few miles out from the village. The location of these places in relation to the village, and the network of footpaths is shown in fig 6. 2. The position, scale, and nature of some of them are also marked on an aerial photograph (fig. 6.12). In what follows each site is briefly described and in most cases depicted by illustrating photographs. There are a number of complicating issues here in terms of scale, distance, what is a space, private and public space, overlooked and non-overlooked space, but most importantly my (an adult) constructions of what a suitable childhood space is, and these are dealt with within the texts which accompany the photographs. Some of the places portrayed do have children in them, or have had children in them, but others do not, or as far as I know have not, and I want to consider how the spaces for childhood in Allswell do exist, and are used to an extent, but not as much as one might anticipate. Therefore it may not be a lack of suitable places which is limiting childhood/environments interactions but rather changes to childhood itself.

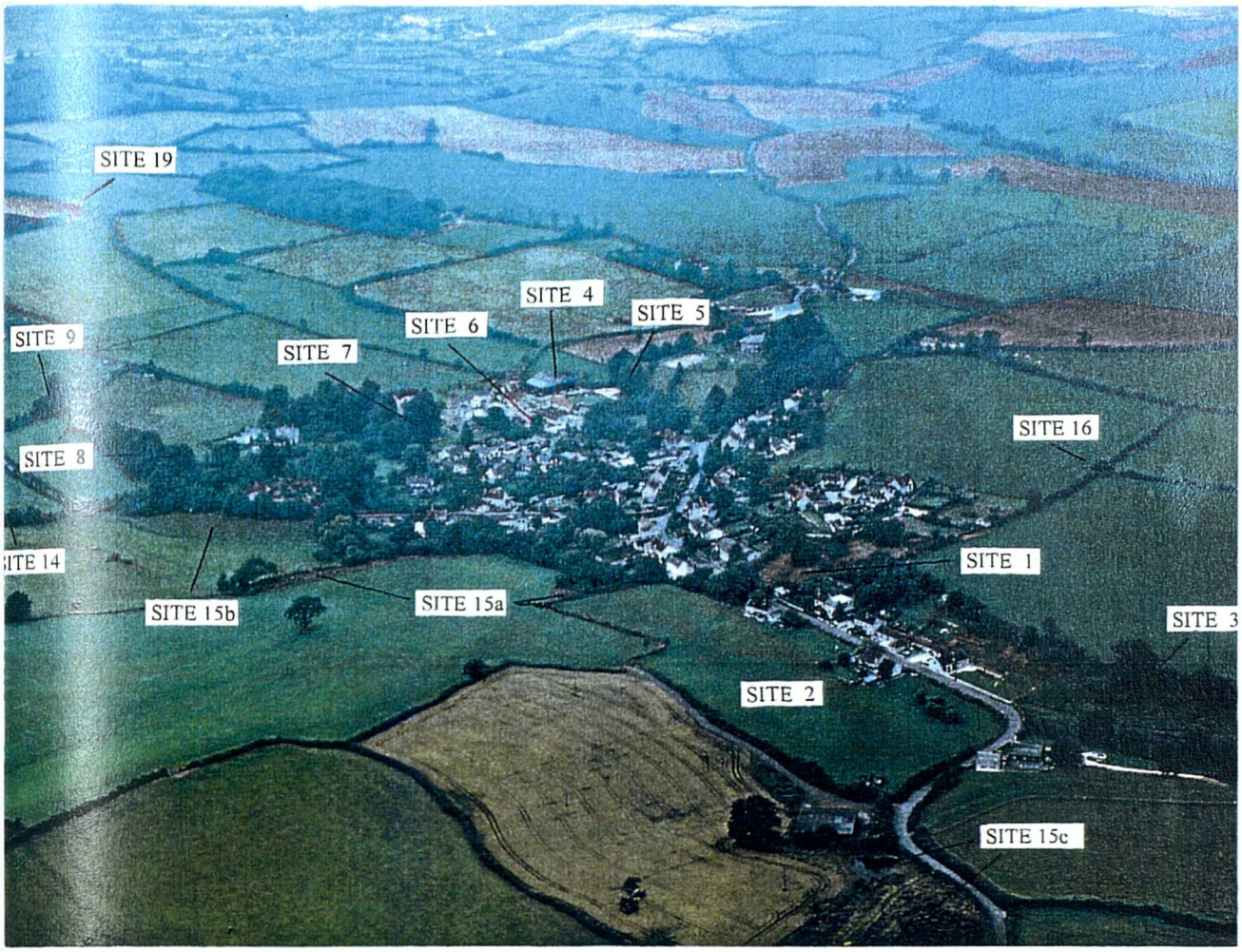


Fig 6.12 Aerial photograph showing location, scale and nature of the in and near village sites considered. Note not all the sites are within view.

As a form or organisation I have decided to classify these sites as:- **In The Village,** those which are actually within the built up area of the village: **Near The Village ,** those which are just outside this inner area: and **More Remote Sites,** sites which are a bit further away but which are significant for one reason or another.

6.3.1 Sites in the Village

This section considers three fields which front onto the main street of the village, and break up the housing pattern; the remaining area of farm yard at Manor Farm; and also some of the trees in the village, all of which are, or apparently could be, sites for childhood use.

FIELD 1 (Marked as Site # 1 on map fig 6.2 and photograph fig 6.12)
This field was retained as part of the farmhouse property of Crest Farm when the rest of the land was sold off and the barns around the house developed. It was thus cut off from agricultural use in economic terms, and was also physically cut off from the main body of agricultural land by the gardens that were developed along with the converted barns. It runs up a slope from the road to the corner garden of Crest Farm House, and is flanked on either side by gardens and houses which front onto the road. When I first came to Allswell it always seemed unused, with long grass and a clump of brambles in the middle. The opening onto the road was a rather overgrown untidy affair which was always slightly ajar (fig 6.13). this seemed to me an ideal place for children to play, being close to houses, easily accessible and obviously not farmed. But there was little evidence that children had used the entrance of the lane or the field itself. The farmhouse and field along with it, have now changed hands and the field has a new gate onto the road and a couple of horses are sometimes grazed there. But it still feels untidy and little used. Margaret who lives almost opposite this field agreed that it did seem a good place for children, saying it was quite 'denyish' but she was sure that children hardly ever had used it to her knowledge, and certainly her's had not. Sue, who lives in one of the converted barns at the top of the field agreed with this, but did say that it was used as a short cut by the children.

FIELD 2 (Site # 2)
This field lies partly opposite the field described above on the other side of the village high street, but has a much larger road frontage and stretches alongside the eastern end of the village high street as it approaches Valley Farm, the last buildings at that end of the village. Two houses and gardens are set into this field, and the stream runs along its one edge, tucked under the wall which forms the side of the road (figs 6:14). There is also a line of six old willows running parallel to the road and stream. Until the break-up of Valley Farm it was owned by the Tanner's and was mainly used for rough grazing. According to Iris who lives in one of the houses surrounded on three sides by the field (and who has now in fact bought it), it has never been cultivated, or fertilised, and thus can be considered as a now rare piece of unimproved pasture. In part this may be due to a steepish rocky slope which makes a central part of the field unsuitable for agricultural machinery. Unlike the first, this field and the stream running through it, does appear to have been,

Fig 6.13 'Gate' to field (site # 1) off village high street.

and still remains, a place where children do go and play. Iris told me 'they've all climbed the willow trees, or attempted to' (int. 5.16), when I asked her who 'they' were, she reeled of a list of names familiar to me as now older children in the village. She also said that James, her son, and Robert from further up the village, had used the field for - 'football, endlessly', and also played in the stream a lot. Now a new set of children use the field. Diana, a mother of two boys, whose house over-looks the field from the other side of the road, told me that her children go there to fish in the stream, and to play with the two children from the other house which is set into the field. Margaret and Ted, the parents of this house confirmed this and told how their children and other friends often played in the stream and the field, and this was also confirmed by the children themselves.

Fig 6.14 View of field (site # 2) along side village high street. (The stream runs alongside the wall).

FIELD 3 (Site # 3)

This field, also at the east end of the village, also used to be part of Valley Farm, and now is owned by the Greyson's who bought the farm house and some of the land immediately closest to it. This field, like the first, always appears unused for anything, and is quite overgrown. It is dissected by a track which serves as access to the sewage works and which is also a footpath. This path/track is not fenced, and meets the village road with a gate and well maintained style, therefore access is not a problem. The footpath is well used, and a number of children do go through this field to places further along the path, but the field itself, appears of little interest to them despite it fitting quite well into the sort of descriptions of places Shoard feared were being lost, with its long unkempt grass and overgrown bushy hedges. It should be noted that all these fields although fronting onto the village high street and thus possibly of development potential fall outside the building line of the village (fig 6.3) and are therefore protected from development.

THE FARM YARD (Site # 4)

The farm yard at Manor Farm consists of what remains after four of the traditional stone buildings which were clustered around one side of the farm house had been converted into five dwellings. Farming still takes place on and from the yard, but only on a reduced scale. What remains are two large metal barns standing side by side and surrounded by a concrete apron. At the top end there is an open area which has gates leading into three fields. This is the site of a large dung heap, a shed, and a number of bits of farming paraphernalia consisting of bits of machinery, a pile of sleepers, a couple of trailers, hay racks and feeding troughs. At the other end there is a open area through which the access track runs. Alongside this track there are various piles of rubble and sub soil, which are quite overgrown, there is also an area of concrete with a pile of gravel and a pile of scalpings on it. Bounding this is a drainage ditch, a narrow strip of land, and then a fence and tall hedge which forms the boundary with the Hall grounds. This farm yard is exploited as play by Ruby and Jack whose garden backs onto part of it, and is also becoming so for children of three other houses nearby as they get old enough to be allowed to 'go off and play'. Before that is was part of the territory of other children now grown out of the 'playing in the barn' phase. Ruby and Jack have a tree house in a stand of conifers (site 5) which are on the strip of land between the ditch and the fence, and this is also the site of den building and other activities (fig 6.15). As friends and visitors of the 'primary users', a number of other village children and children from further afield, also have access to these spaces (fig 6.16).

The smaller of the two barns is a Dutch barn with open sides barring a lean-to construction at the top end. This is usually in use for housing a few cattle most of the year, sheep at lambing time, and also for storing hay and straw. The big barn has the same uses but is also a more general storage area for things such as, disused cars; furniture; timber and other building products; and all the detritus of string, posts, wire, tools, nails, gate hooks, water piping, sacks, medicines, oils, old sack, scales, and spare tractor parts, which most farms accumulate. The barn also has a number of stables built into the side of it and four horses are kept there and in the adjoining fields, providing extra income for the farm owners. Both these barns are areas in which children play. To a degree this fluctuates as the use of the barn changes, and also has fluctuated as the different cohorts of children have passed through the 'playing in the barns phase'. The fact that children do play in these

Fig 6.15 Tree house and den in conifers at Manor Farm (sites # 4/5).

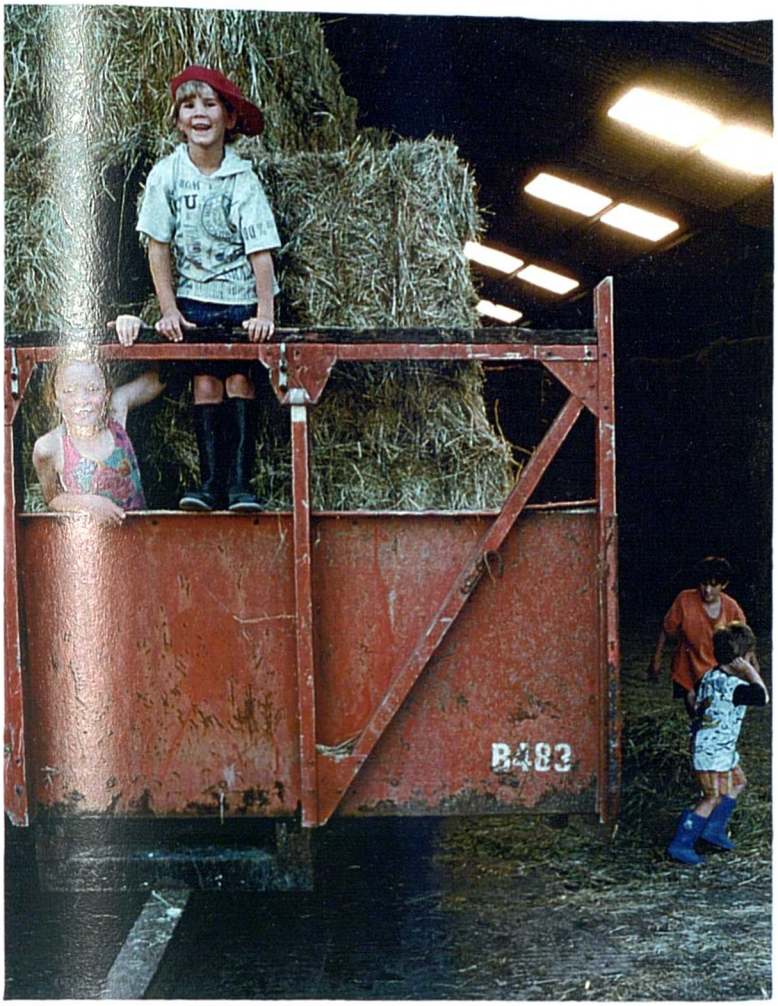


Fig 6.16 Children playing in and around the big barn at Manor Farm (site # 4).

barns is very much tied up to links either the children and/or the parents have with my family who are the owners. This is considered in more detail in the next chapter under the heading of gatekeepers.

TREES (Sites # 5, # 6, # 7)

I have already commented that the village is populated by quite a number of trees, and some of these are indeed used for climbing and for tree house construction. James Maw and the Huxter children have tree houses in their respective gardens, but beyond the confines of gardens, there are trees which children make use of. Site # 5 is the stand of conifers which supports Ruby and Jack's tree house; on occasions, both will enter these trees at ground level and then appear as a beaming head (alarmingly) high in the tree tops. Jack and others also climb the ash tree (Site # 6), which is on the side of the lane leading to the barns and his house. There is also a swing hanging from the lower branches of this tree, which children from a number of houses use. The large horse chestnut in the churchyard (Site # 7) is climbable for children of about six years old and upwards, up to where the trunk splays out into a number of main branches. This provides a platform where children can rest or hide. In the summer the outer branches of the tree hang down virtually to the ground forming an inner enclosed space around the trunk. I only thought to include this tree because I happened upon two village children and visiting cousins, up in the main branches (see fig 6.16), but in all I don't think it's use is a very common occurrence.

6.3.2 Near The Village

As well as the above sites which are in the village, either next to or between houses and/or fronting onto the road, there are a number of sites which are just 'out in the country', these include a overhung bank and clump of bushes, the valley and stream at each end of the village and a number of other abandoned or even newly created untidy corners.

BANK BY THE CRICKET PITCH (Site # 8)

The cricket pitch is just beyond the western edge of the village. On one side it is flanked by the green-lane shown, and on the other by a small field which is then bounded by one of the lanes leading out of the village. Between the pitch and the field there is a small scarp of about fifteen foot which is steep, rocky and overgrown.

Fig 6.17 The churchyard chestnut tree in winter (showing branch formation), and children climbing same tree in summer (site # 7).

In places the hedge has grown to the extent of leaning over to form a inner space, where, due to shade the undergrowth is thin (fig 6.18). When cricket matches are at home, the children that gather along with mums to watch will regularly go exploring, disappearing through a gap in the fence which gives them easy access to this space. Two older children also told me that they and a third companion used to make dens here. The field is not part of a farm but is attached to a nearby house which is currently let as the owner lives elsewhere. So like the other fields described it is disconnected from mainstream agricultural ownership, and like fields 1 and 3 is too small and 'difficult' to be of much consequence in terms of rent, although it is sometimes cropped for hay by Monks Hill farm. Consequently there is little incentive for the bank to be tidied up, and little feeling that the field is being used for farming purposes.

BUSHES IN 'COWLEYS' (FIELD NAME) (Site # 9)

Just at the end of the green lane, which hits the crest of the north slope of the valley at an oblique angle, and next to the far end of the cricket pitch, is a small steep field, along the top of which the bridle way passes, and down which another path leads, over a small culvert to a gate which opens onto the lane. On part of the stonier slope down to the valley floor there is an area of thorn and bramble, below that is the stream, and then another strip of flat land between the stream and the hedge. On one end of this, and bounded by a bend in the stream and the lane hedge is another small patch of thorn (fig 6.19).This area according to Walter, who has worked on, and known Manor Farm for many years, has always been much the same, and although threatened with clearance once or twice, it has not been. Again this is probably due to the difficulties presented by the rocky nature of the ground, the steep slope, and the relatively small benefit which would be gained. Around and between the bushes on the slope, and the hedge which runs down along side them, are a number of pockets of quite secluded spaces. Tom told me that in his childhood some 65 years ago, it was a favourite haunt for children. When I asked him if he could remember having dens in his childhood, he said immediately,

> I could tell you where there was the biggest one around here, In 'Cowleys' (still the field's name). Down over those bushes. It was a fantastic one down there *(so who used it?)* Used to go there every day...There was a hole under, made a hole, cut a hole in and you were dead centre, nobody could see you, it was just like an Indian bloody house in there. Terrific place. *(Most of the village kids would go there at some point?)* Oh yes. Saturday the kids would take potatoes up there, have a little fire and stay up there all day cooking it (17. 21).

Fig 6.18 Overgrown bank below cricket pitch (site # 8). (Top) - a gap in the fence provides easy access. (Below) - the overgrown stony bank seen from below (winter).

Fig 6.19 The bushes in 'Cowleys' (site # 9). (Top) - the bushes on the slope where Tom said there used to be a den. (Bottom) - the bushes between the stream and lower hedge where I was told by one mother that her 7 year old daughter and friends sometimes play.

After so many years the bushes are still there, and it takes little imagination, or would take little manipulation, to see it as a den site again, but it does not seem so. is not. Children do come here when cricket matches are on, and I was told by one mother that children sometimes play in the lower bushes. Access to this space is not very difficult; one of the most frequently used paths from the village passes within yards of these bushes from the village, (many people do a short circuit up the green lane down the path in the field, past the bushes, and to the lane and then back to the village), This is almost quasi-public space, though there is quite often a small number of cows in the field.

THE VALLEY, STREAM and PONDS. (Sites # 10, # 11, # 12)

The valley which runs away west from the end of the green lane and the cricket pitch, is the route of the stream, which meanders, on a small scale, along the valley bottom (fig 6.20), and is accompanied by a main, and often used footpath. Thus children also have easy access to the stream. My brother who has recently built some stepping stones across the stream told me that some kids had carried out some major 'civil engineering ' just down stream of these, they had made a sort of model harbour out of the many loose stones lying about. There is usually some evidence of such activities and dam building somewhere along the stream, and in the interviews a number of parents referred to their children playing in the stream at one time or another. On one occasion I heard Ruby and Jack and three of the Nutbrown children planning to go up to the 'river' and build a raft, they cycled off and I followed having got my camera, and Sam, and we got there to witness their adventure (fig 6.21). In the valley, and passed by the footpath are two ponds which have been created by impounding the stream. Both are part of Manor's Farm manager's landscape improvement scheme, and the larger pond near to the village is also part of the shoot infrastructure, and is consequently quite securely fenced off. The second is more open, and Sue told how her son had taken a small rubber dingy up there to launch. At the other, east, end of the village, the stream, followed more or less by a footpath, runs through a corridor of trees which in parts completely close over it. In one place where a willow has fallen, but kept growing, there is a completely enclosed space (fig 6.22). This is known as 'the den' to some of the children at that end of the village and a swing has been erected, and there is often evidence of dam building games, this is probably one of the places most used by children in the village.

Fig 6.20 The valley, showing course of stream (site # 10), (before pond was dug by the willow tree).

Fig 6.21 Children playing by the stream in the valley (site # 11).

OVERGROWN PATHS AND ABANDONED CORNERS (Sites # 13 - 16)

After following the stream, the footpath then diverges through a veritable jungle of long grass and weeds. (fig 6.23, site # 13), this being a steep corner of a flatter field which has been set aside from agricultural production and fenced off and planted with trees. Other footpaths, such as that running up to the neighbouring village of Blackmead are a bit more well trodden and thus kept clear, but these can still remain quite jungley and secretive (site # 14, fig 6.24). Other odd 'corners' of farmland which butt up to, or are close to the village have also been planted with trees and/or set aside for conservation purposes. These are mostly on quite a small scale - (sites # 15a/15b (fig 6.25)), but site # 15c, shows quite a large area which has been taken out of agricultural production and planted with trees, and

Fig 6.22 'The den': an overhung space in the trees over the stream at the east end of the village.

Fig 6.23 'Wild' area which footpath cuts through (site # 13).

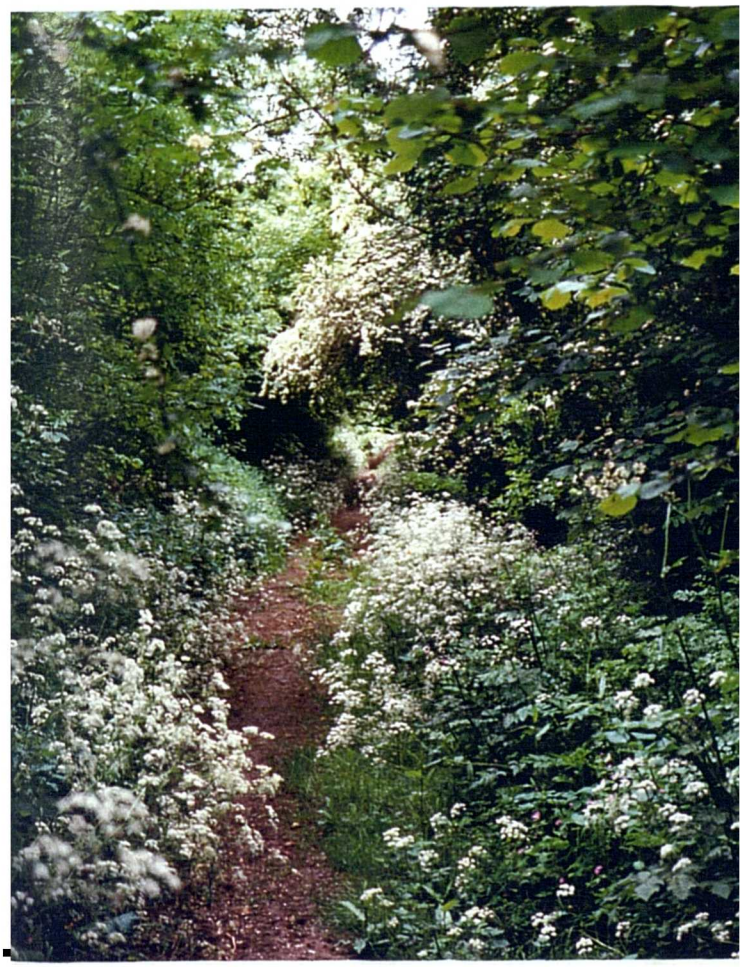


Fig 6. 24 Enclosed footpath (site # 14).

Fig 6.25 New 'wild' area. A corner of a field cut off by the stream, left unmanaged except for tree planting (site # 15b).

is also the site of a new pond. This is immediately accessible of the lane leading from the village, and there is also here a quite new barn, remote from the main farm complex in the next village (fig 6.26). It is noticeable that many of the places I have described above are on the steeper slopes of the valley through which the stream runs. It is, in part, their actual steepness which makes them difficult sites for development or for intensive agriculture. These, and other odd corners of land which are difficult for other reasons; access, size and shape, cut off by steam; means that there are a number of areas dotted around the village, some quite small but others much larger, which are abandoned or are only extensively managed. In some cases these have been recently created through both the pressure on farms to be more environmentally aware, but also through the increasing technical and temporal scale of agricultural production which makes the intensive farming of such corners impractical and unprofitable. Often such sites are corners trimmed off larger fields leaving the remaining cropping area more compatible with the use of large machines. These are forces which are creating new 'nooks and crannies' in the countryside.

Site # 16 shows that it is possible for overgrown corners to exist even within the flatter more intensively managed areas. This site comprises of the junction of two

Fig 6.26 New pond in abandoned corner of a field. Barn in the background (site 15c).

field boundaries at the corners of two fields. Here the hedge has grown high and wide and has formed a inner space which appears to have some form of entrance, (but I have no evidence children have used it). These fields are predominately used from cereal production and this and other corners are not farmed up to their apex but only up to the turning circle of the machinery involved in production. Because of this there is little benefit from cutting back the height or width of the hedge. In this way modern agricultural methods or cereal production will be similarly forming other abandoned corners defined by the radii of the turning circles of modern seed drills and combines, even within flat intensively farmed landscapes.

6.3.3 More Remote Sites

These sites are deeper into the countryside, the furthermost one being some two miles from the centre of the village. They have been included for a number of reasons. Firstly 'the tump' is a prominent skyline landmark for the village and certainly part of its landscape. The woods are also a key part of the landscape in certain areas, and as they are seen as significant in many accounts of country childhoods and are seen as places of countryside recreation more generally they

have been included. The other sites are less obvious but are intriguing/inciting places within the landscape, and show that it is not in fact bereft of such places.

THE WOODS (site # 17)

Further along from the green lane and cricket pitch, and above the south slope of the valley, and stretching in parts across to the lane leading away from the village, is an area of woods. These I feel hold great potential for childhood adventures. I have put these in more remote category because, although they are not very far from the village, they feel more inaccessible due to the fact that they are not on a footpath, and have to entered by climbing a fence. It feels more remote than the footpaths, even though, many village walkers going up the valley will pass along and beyond the one edge of these woods. There is in fact an unofficial 'entrance' to them where the fence has been loosened by many passing persons. The woods consist of mixed broad leafed trees and large proportion of once coppiced hazel. This provides a very thick canopy and consequently there is, in large parts of the woods, little undergrowth (fig 6.27). This makes it easy to move though them when not sticking to established paths. Also there is a network of rides and clearings which make intriguing routes though the woods (fig 6.28) which emerge at various points around them, either into various fields, or at a couple of points, the lane.

Fig 6.27 Inside the woods (site # 17).

Fig 6.28 Examples of the rides running through the woods (site # 17).

In the woods, there are old two shacks next to a large clearing (6.29). They are battered and abandoned, with doors partially hanging off , but are still basically in tact, and one has a chair in it. A while ago, somewhat sinisterly, one had a pink, slightly raised 2 dimensional model of 'Mr Blobby' which had be used as a target for air rifle shooting. More recently the owner of the wood, a builder who lives some distance away, has built a rather spectacular tree shelter within the splay of a now mature copied hazel (fig 6.30). There is also evidence of fires being lit near this a swing was put up for a while. All these were deeply interesting to Jack and Ruby, Christopher and Sam, all of whom have visited the woods with me, on a number of occasions. All these features of this part of the woods are no more than 200 metres from the footpath which runs through the valley. This wood has recently come under the use of the Manor Farm shoot, and the tracks of the ATV the gamekeeper uses can be seen. There was already a lot of uncertainty about these, and the other woods nearby, and the growing presence of the shoot has added to this, but I have been in these woods a number of times, both alone, and with children, and we have never encountered anyone else. (This would not be a problem if we did). More

Fig 6.29 Old shacks in the woods (site # 17).

Fig 6.30 Tree house in the woods (site # 17).

significantly some of the children do see the woods and the game keeper with a certain degree of excited fascination, and some claimed to have let the live 'lure' magpie out of the Larson magpie trap the game keeper sometimes uses. Jack and Ruby and the Nutbrown children, who live the other side of the woods, have walked to each other houses through these woods a few times, and clearly find it very exciting.

THE DUTCH BARN (Site # 18)

This a Dutch barn remote from the main farm yard of Manor Farm. It was probably built in the 1950s for the storage of hay and straw up in the fields near to where it

may be harvested and subsequently used. In the photograph (fig 6.31) it is empty, but in the past it has been in various stages of fullness with straw bales, which sometimes has obviously been there for a long time and were going to waste. A main footpath/bridle way runs within twenty yards of the end of the barn and there is no fence or any boundary between them. Gwen told me that she has taken her boys there for 'a good romp' and Sue told me her children had gone there sometimes and that it had been a bit of a gathering point for older children for a while.

Fig 6.31 The Dutch Barn (site # 18).

THE TUMP (Site # 19)

The tump is properly named Wellsdon Common, and is part of a farm which is centred in the next village. It is a prominent feature on the skyline from various parts of Allswell and the surrounding area. Being a steep small hill, with two trees on top, (which from any distance look like one tree) it is an evocatively eye catching site (fig 6.32). As such The Allswell Morris Men dance there to greet the dawn on the summer solstice. It is also the 'objective' for many walks by the slightly more intrepid Allswellians, although it is in fact only two miles from the heart of the village, and

Fig 6.32 Wellsdon Common or 'one tree hill' in relation to the village.

can be all but reached by footpaths which skirt its lower fringe. To gain the summit a fence has to be negotiated, or a couple of non-footpath gates passed through. It has certainly been the ambition of some older children in Allswell to get to 'the tump', or 'one tree hill on their own'. The barn above is en route to the tump and there are also two other woods near by.

THE OLD COAL TIP (Site # 20)

I imagine this place to be like the elevated vantage point Crompton's William sometimes took advantage of, as in -

> William sat on the crest of the hill his chin cupped in his hands. He surveyed the expanse of country which swept out before him, and as he surveyed it he became the owner of all the land and houses as far as he could see (Crompton, 1992).

for when you are on it, the village and surrounding land is visible in a panorama (fig 6.33). The site is an old coal tip which remains as the last sign of the neighbouring village of Blackmead's coal mine. It is undulating, quite steep in parts, and covered in sparse grass and pockets of thorn trees. It is obviously well used by local people, because it is well routed with paths and tracks, but these are people from the next village which boarders the site. As far as I know only a few Allswellians have been

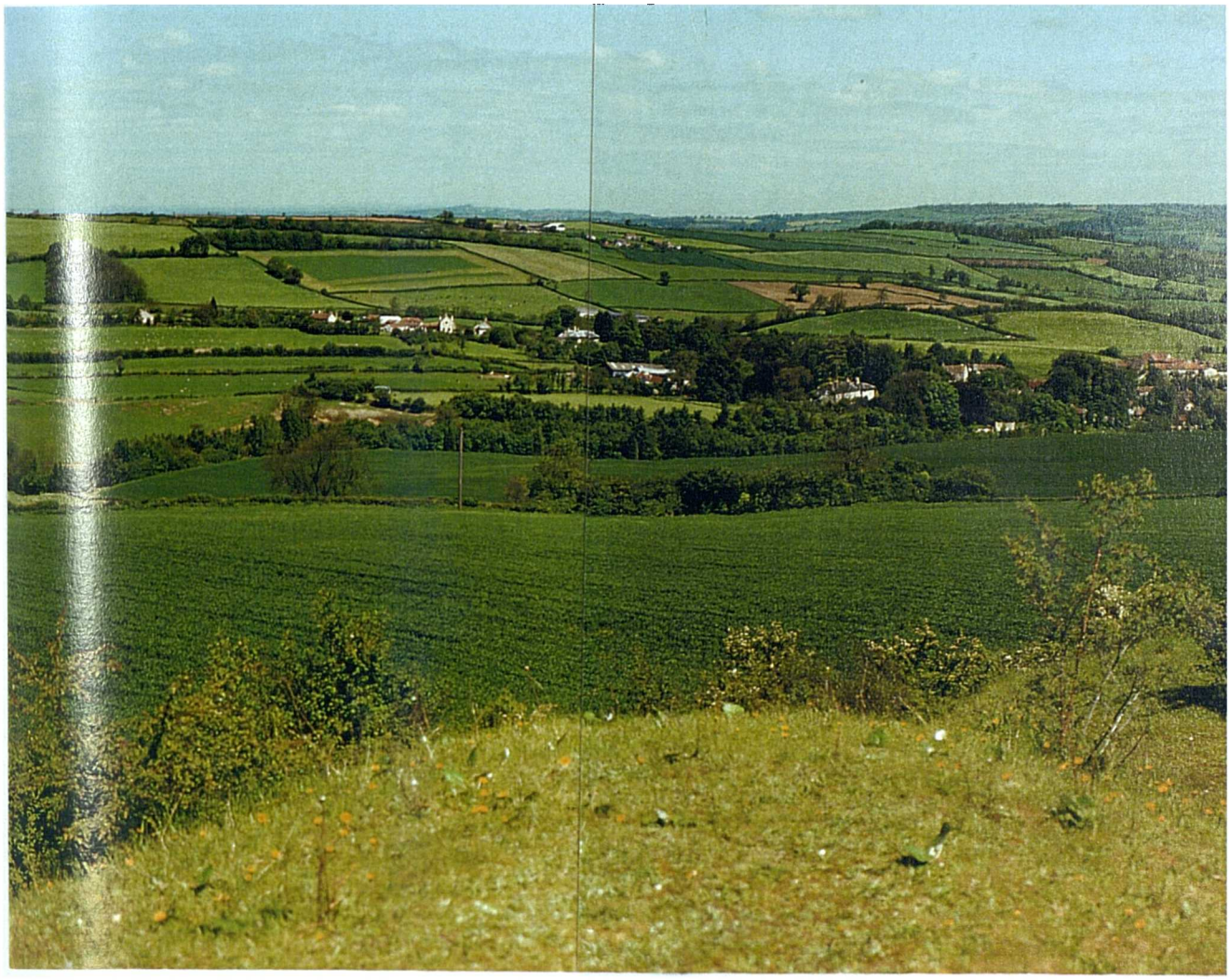


Fig 6.33 View of Allswell from the top of the old coal tip (site # 20).

up here, I and Sam have, Jack and Ruby and their parents have, (and they saw deer running along the skyline). It is not on a footpath but can be reached by either going up the lane and crossing two fields or along a footpath and crossing one field. From the edge of the village it is perhaps only 15 minutes walk away.

RATTLE SPRINGS (Site # 21)

Half a mile from the coal tip, along the top of the ridge, which forms the south crest of the valley, in which Allswell lies, and still in Blackmead, is the site of an ancient hill fort. Tucked in below this is Rattle Springs, a source of water which feeds a small stream which runs down the valley side and into the stream which runs through Allswell. The spring pool, which was cut into the side of the hill is now silted

up and surrounded by trees and undergrowth on the hillside. This is another wild and secretive space (fig 6.34).

Together all these sites makes a landscape rich in imaginative possibilities for the kind of countryside adventure that William or the Famous Five might have had. Perhaps more prosaically they are indicative of a landscape which has a whole variety of places/spaces which have not been tidied away. Some of these children do or have in the past used, of others this is less obviously so. Another point to be made is that this was claimed to be an indicative survey because there in fact a number of other places which also could have been included. The critical point is that these places are there. If children do not use them so often as they once did or as much as they might in the imaginative constructions of country childhood idylls

Fig 6.34 Rattle Springs site # 21.

this is for reasons other than the loss of these spaces. As it will be seen parental fear and uncertainty over private property and trespass may play a key part in such processes.

CHAPTER 7

ENVISIONING ALLSWELL'S CHILDHOODS: CONTEXTUALISATIONS AND STRUCTURING OF CONTEMPORARY COUNTRY CHILDHOODS

This chapter now begins to set out how the children and their childhoods are seen, or contextualised, by adults (predominantly parents) in Allswell. The intention is to ground the more generalised discourses of country childhoods, to see how they are rearticulated, developed and deconstructed in a particular setting, and understand the structuring that is bound up with, and subsequent to, such contextualisations. Investigating such local reconstructions and applications of wider spread, more generalised popular discourses of the rural, rural idyll, (and other cultural constructions), is now seen as a key part of any move to understand such issues (Jones, 1995; Cloke and Milbourne, 1992; Crouch, 1992), and is, to an extent, the common ground in the exchange between Philo (1993) and Murdoch and Pratt (1993), over the role and status of postmodern approaches to the rural.

Section 7.1 shows how childhood in the village *is* seen as a form of idyll; that the 'village children' are seen as a 'collective entity' on occasions; and that many elements of the country childhood discourses considered earlier are in place. It also shows that some of these are developed in surprising ways, or are even challenged, and that the constructions of the village as a childhood idyll are indeed heavily shaped by comparisons with the urban, as anticipated in Chapter 4. But there are also various indications that the pressures on childhood considered in Chapter 3 have penetrated the idyll image to an extent, especially when parents compare their own childhoods with those of their children.

Section 7.2 then begins to look at the structuring these views of childhood have on children's lives. Account is taken of changes in the village, particularly its slow development and the retreat of agriculture from the village. Also accounts of past childhoods are considered in order to reconstruct some of the cultural and material legacies under which current constructions are formed. Section 7.3 then concludes

the chapter by exploring and developing some of the major themes to emerge from the research.

7.1 CONTEXTUALISATIONS OF ALLSWELL'S CHILDHOODS

To recap on the orientating approach of this work, it is argued that contextualisations of childhood in Allswell - the way childhood is seen - particularly, but not exclusively by parents, will be a major force in the structuring of children's lives; as will the (changing) physical environment in which their lives are acted out. But it is stressed that these are not the only structuring forces on children's lives and this is also dealt with.

The headings below under which these contextualisations are considered have emerged as themes through the study of the transcribed interview tapes; the participant observation field notes; and my more general observation of the village. They in places match those headings in Chapters 2 and 3 and as such can be seen as confirmations, or developments of the points made there. But some headings arise out of contradiction or tension with the points made earlier, or within the discourses of the village itself. Yet others are new, and have intruded as new points or stories into my (initial) conceptualisations, and are thus the surprises, the recognition of which, along with confirmations and contradictions, were proffered as textual analysis 'triggers' in the earlier descriptions of my methodological approaches.

7.1.1 Rural/Urban Comparisons

Throughout the research in the village it became clear that a major element of people's constructions and judgements of the village, and childhood in the village, were ongoing, more or less specific comparisons with other, but particularly urban, environments. These comparisons see the country/village as a predominately, (but not exclusively), favourable place to be bring up children, and in doing so they often tap into (and justify) the types of constructions of the urban set out in Chapter 4. These comparative constructions appear as a seam which runs through most of the sections below. For example, the village is seen to be - safe; or at least safer than the urban; - healthy; or at least more healthy that the urban - close to nature; or at least ... and so on. These findings are in parallel to Little and Austin's (1996)

research into another village in the same region as Allswell, in which 'mothers....claimed that the country is a safe place to bring up children, arguing that *they can have more freedom than their urban counterparts away from the dirt, and dangers of city living'* (Cited in Valentine 1997a, p. 1, emphasis added).

This notion of the country childhood idyll being constructed as an idyll in comparison to urban childhood parallels a similar process where the rural idyll itself is constructed in comparison to the urban more generally. In discussing this elsewhere (Jones, 1995) I also suggest that it is this (favourable) comparative construction which keeps at bay concern that the past rural was itself an idyll in comparison to today's rural. This proposition is closely matched by Bell (1994) who in his investigations into resident's perceptions of the village of Childerley, found that although the 'majority view' was that that village did not really live up to the 'rural idyll' that it might once have been, it is, he stresses, 'important to keep in mind in understanding the attraction, (felt for) Childerley and places like it' - that they still retain more vestiges of the rural idyll than the 'typical English city' (p. 96).

These comparative constructions are deeply embedded within the discourses of the village and so they are considered within the specific contexts below. It would not be possible to fillet them all out and present in one section. But initially I present a few examples of how such comparisons are made and the meanings of the village (mostly) as a childhood idyll they generate.

A number of interview subjects, compared their child's or children's experiences with those of other children within their extended family, or those of friends, who were being brought up in (sub)urban settings. For example Linda told me of a related family -

> ...and they live in Reigate, which is absolutely smog ridden, there is the main London - Brighton road at the end of - they are in sort of suburban housing, but they couldn't let their child out anywhere, and there are only small gardens, so everything in his upbringing - and he already has asthma - everything in his upbringing is going to have to be orchestrated unless they move (6.12).

While Linda was concerned with health and freedom, Gwen in her interview, felt that city children grew up quicker,

> I just feel city children, they have a different experience and they grow up very quickly. I've got friends who live in Bristol, and my sister lives on the Wirral, sort of suburban Liverpool, and her children, you know, haven't been children for very long. They've just, I don't know, I suppose it's me being a bit old fashioned... they grow up very, very quickly, very street wise and everything (10.5).

Such concerns were also expressed by Margaret (Fields)[1]

> I think its to do with the culture we live in now. I think it's something to do with you feel that it's safer out here some how for kids, and maybe they are not exposed to all the things that are going on in the inner city (21.1).

Another interview subject, Joyce (Huxter), who has three children, and is also a teacher with experience in a number of differing secondary schools, claimed that from her experience of teaching in a town comprehensive, which had a mixed intake of both rural and urban children, that there was a discernible difference between rural and town children in general, and it was the former who were in some ways 'better' children -

> one was able to spot I suppose the village children after a few weeks, ..(they)...I have to say they were better behaved, they spoke better, they were polite... they were much more sociable. They were quieter in class and were generally much more acceptable...the others (those who had come up from the town primary schools) were much more sort of streetwise, a bit bolder and didn't respond to discipline as well (11.7).

Consequently this teacher and parent felt that the countryside was generally a better childhood environment, and considered Allswell an ideal place for her children to grow up in. As will be shown this rural/urban comparison manifested itself in various dualised contextualisations of childhood, such as safety/fear, cleanliness/dirt, control/freedom, but not always in a straightforward stacking up of these onto the rural/urban dualism. In some cases these were structured in a more complex fashion, but usually in favour of the rural, and these are dealt with in the sections below.

The key point I want to make here is that rural childhoods, in comparison to their urban counterparts, are seen as purer, more innocent, and as a result last longer. There is a clear idea that the rural is the environment in which childhood can best fulfil its potential. Other environments, particularly the urban, constrain and/or corrode this potential for the fulfilment of childhood. The erosion of childhood - although almost a universal concern with people making comparisons between their child's and their own up-bringing - is seen not to bite so deeply in rural settings. These findings are closely paralleled by Gill Valentine (1997a), who, in her in-depth qualitative research of a village in Derbyshire, found strikingly similar

[1] Research subjects are introduced by their first name only unless the name is common to more than one person interviewed, or it is felt that family identity is useful in that children of the named research subject also appear in the text and thus they can be identified as a family.

responses and statements to those from my research, and some examples of these are given at various points in what follows.

CITY VISITORS

There are some examples of this view of Allswell as a comparative childhood idyll, being seen from the outside. This comes in the form of friends and families with children who are connected with people who live in Allswell, coming to visit and to stay 'in the country'. One some occasions, when families in Allswell go away for a holiday, relatives, or sometimes friends, often from urban or suburban areas, will come and use these temporarily vacated houses for, as Polly with three young children called it, 'a cheap holiday' (19.1). I interviewed her when she came to use her sister's house for a week, and she described herself as 'a townie... who lives on a private estate, on the borderline of a council estate which is on the outskirts of (major city)'. She also told me that they thought it was 'brilliant' to come to Allswell because, 'well it's a completely different way of life for us' and the 'kids love it'. Although the family in Allswell goes to visit this family, they have never gone to use their house as a holiday base when they have been away. The positive cultural weighting put on the countryside, especially for children, is in evidence here. Somehow the (sub)urban children need to know about the countryside. Saying why she liked coming to use her sister's house in Allswell, Polly explained

> well it's so peaceful and quiet, and you've got the countryside. If you were here you would learn about the countryside, wouldn't you. Instead of going past a field and saying I wonder if that's straw or whatever, (laughs), you know, I wonder - you'd find out wouldn't you, you'd find out what birds - but where we are, you don't bother. *(But why do you think its important that kids know about that sort of thing?)*[2] Well, er , well I - well perhaps its not important, but I think they should know what its like out in the countryside...*(Do you think it's good for them?)* Oh yes definitely, especially at this age, (7, 4.5, 2.5)[3]. (19.2).

Polly then added - in line with the idea that the countryside becomes a trap for teenage children

> but I don't know if I'd like to be stuck out here when they're that much older (19.2).

Many other research subjects had stories about how children of family and friends loved coming to visit Allswell, and some of these are used below to illustrate various aspects of constructions of Allswell as a childhood idyll, for such it is fundamentally seen as being.

---

[2] The text in italics indicates me speaking in the interviews.

[3] Wherever possible the age of the children being discussed or later speaking themselves is given in order to begin to show how the differing age of children cross cuts the constructions of childhood.

7.1.2 Allswell as a Childhood Idyll

Having suggested that the constructions of the village as a childhood idyll are powerfully underpinned by comparisons to the (sub)urban, this next section briefly picks out some of the descriptions of the village as a childhood idyll, for that, with some reservations, is predominately how it is seen, and why in fact a number of families chose to locate there.

During my interview with Chris and George (Oakbrown), parents with four children who live some way out of the village along one of the lanes, I was given a list of 'pro's' and 'cons' they had drawn up when deciding to move to their current house. The 'pros' consisted of '1; space. 2; peace from traffic and people. 3; learn about animals and vegetation. 4; learn to self amuse. 5; isolated from crime, violence and drugs etc. 6; small family school. 7. *Children are Free Spirits.*' Other parents had similar check-lists of the benefits of Allswell as a childhood environment.

Victor, who has a son of three, said of Allswell,

> Well I think its a nice environment, it's relatively quiet, safe, in terms of traffic and things like that kind. Pleasant community. So I think it has idyllic prospects for childhood...and you can watch things grow and play in the stream.(3.2),

while the same child's mother, Linda, looked forward to Christopher, and other young children, doing what she sees the older children doing now.

> Yes, and they will want to do the activities that older children do, they are out in a field and out climbing trees, getting in ditches, climbing out of tunnels and doing things like that and making...whatever you call them - tree houses (6.1).

Joyce, whose children are aged 8, 14, and 16, said

> The children do appreciate waking up in the morning with the birds singing and no constant noise of cars going by every second. The space really, the space to go out and enjoy what you can see around you in the trees and flowers. The pollution of course is a big factor. Of course because of the traffic thing I feel it is much safer here. I feel as well that they are very much part of the community which it is possible to have in a village rather than in a town...(11.2).

In these extracts most of the components of the country childhood idyll which I identified in chapter 2 are present - nature, space, freedom, health, safety, community, playing with other children - and all these are set in comparison to urban environments. Consequently the countryside in general, and Allswell as a particular part of it, is seen as the best place for childhood. Joyce quoted above, went on to say -

> Oh yes I think it (the countryside) is the best place, (to bring up children). People perceive it as that, and I think it is absolutely true. I can't think why anybody would prefer really to be in the middle of a city or even on the outskirts (11.7).

Others when asked why they thought the village was a good place to bring up children, also felt it was the potential the countryside around Allswell had to offer as a site of childhood that made it idyllic.

> I prefer the countryside (to bring up children). you have lots of places to play, the fields and whatever, compared to living in a city (14.8).

> In a nutshell I just think it's a nice environment for kids to grow up - compared with - in a large town or large estate (21.1).

When I suggested to Margaret and Ted (Fields) that children weren't that obviously visible in and around the village, Ted replied,

> But they're there, they find they're own places, (and then Margaret added), yes they do. I think trees - and sort of being overhanging and things has a big attraction for them. It's copsey isn't it. I don't know why, that seems to feel safe (21.4).

Such constructions of the countryside in general, and Allswell within that as a childhood idyll, did mean that some parents had consciously chosen to move to, or stay, in the village at the time when they were having, or planning to have, children. I asked Gwen,

> *(So when you moved, did you - ?)* (anticipating the question), Yes thought about children, yes, if - we were going to settle, and were going to have a family, and this would be the place to be, really (10.1).

I have already suggested that the village has reached a kind of critical mass in terms of childhood numbers which makes it attractive to other parents with children. This is a key part of the notion of idyll, the attractions of the countryside and small community would be considerably lessened for families with children if there were not other children to share it with, as one mother said of her children, 'I think it would be grim if they were the only kids here' (8.4). Another couple with three children who had recently moved to the village, described how they had asked if there were other children in the village, when they were deciding on moving into Allswell.

> *(When you chose this house in Allswell, how high in your minds was - this is where the kids were going to live?).* I would like to think quite highly, but it was a very difficult decision generally...I mean the multiplicity of factors that have to be satisfied are large, but certainly it felt good. We checked to see that there were children in the village, it was a factor, knowing that there were. (Partner); I think we walked down the village and we spoke to people and one of the questions we asked were "are there any children here". Of course we didn't want them to be isolated. *(If you were looking for properties without kids would you have looked in the...?)* If we were without kids I possibly would have a very, very slight preference for something in the city provided I also had somewhere to escape to for, say, weekends. But I think this is a good place for kids to be (13.4).

This notion of the rural being seen as a childhood idyll come through strongly yet briefly in Bell's (1994) findings in the village of Childerley where,

> many Childerleyans also talked about the countryside as a better place for family. The phrases "better for the children" and "good for the family" are conversational cowslips for the village. Like that famous English country flower, *they are touchstones of what is right and good about country living.* Parents often cite the cleanliness and safety of country life....(one villager told Bell) "It's been really great bringing up kids in a natural environment. They're sort of natural kids, and I think that's better. I wouldn't want to have brought them up inside (a city). and they're real happy kids. They love it" (p. 93, emphasis added).

In Valentine's (1997a) research, which was directly orientated towards notions of child safety as part of country childhood idyll, she produces a number of interview extracts which show parents talk in very similar terms to those in Allswell about their village's childhood potential. Valentine concludes that in the village where she did her research, it 'was seen to offer both access to more space, and also more opportunity for environmental experimentation, such as den building and climbing trees' (p. 4).

Some research subjects to an extent qualified the notion of rural idyll, suggesting instead, that the vital thing for childhood is 'access to space; the sort of outside space, that's the most important thing, whether it's rural, or you know...(somewhere else)..(18.3). So here it is *space* itself which is the childhood idyll, and this respondent went on to suggest that the urban fringe might provide even more accessible outdoor space than the rural, because of the sort of transitory status of land use which Ward (1990) considers.

Others, like Polly, - the 'townie' who wouldn't like to be 'stuck' in the village with older children - saw the idyll as being distinctly finite, in that it may well pall for children once teenage was reached. For example Jane who has two daughters (5, 3) told me,

> ...there is in the back of our mind that maybe we will ***have*** to move *(at that sort of time?)* yes when Anne (elder child) gets to teenage. (But) They may not want to move, they me be very countrified (7.1).

These sorts of constructions again closely matches material set out in Chapter 3. The idea that the countryside becomes a trap and problem for teenagers reinforces the extent to which it as an idyll is linked to younger childhood. As children grow up and gradually transform from children into adults, the countryside is seen first to fade in importance to them and then in some cases to even become an impediment to their social, intellectual, economic and recreational aspirations.

THE COUNTRYSIDE IS A BETTER PLACE TO BRING UP KIDS IF YOUR POOR

It emerged in some of the interviews, and on reflection may be a more general theme about country childhoods, that the countryside is often seen as a better place to bring up your children if you are poor. This may have an historical legacy in that there is an understanding that somehow in the countryside you won't go hungry, that there are opportunities for getting around shortages of money/food by such means as poaching, gathering 'wild' harvests, and having access to land to grow things on and keep the odd animal. Samuel (1975), in his account of life in the Oxfordshire village of Quarry in the late 19th century argued that here - due to access to some common woodland and other opportunities such as the keeping of the family pig, 'poaching' and 'totting' - 'it was possible to make "a bit of a living" even when wage-paid labour gave out; and even when there was no money, to keep the table supplied with food, and have enough fuel to feed the fire' (p. 227). More contemporary notions may revolve around the idea that there are free resources for entertaining and stimulating children in the countryside, and that the problems which come with contemporary urban poverty, such as crime and poor housing and environment, are avoided by being in the countryside. For example Linda said

> the crunch probably comes in my view if you are in financial difficulties and you know your circumstances are not good and you can't give your children a lot of opportunity, then maybe living in the countryside actually you access to things that are free (6.3).

When I suggested to Jane that

> *(Potentially life could be hard in the country?)* (she replied), yes, *(But it's not in Allswell,- except for us).* (laughter). Yes, but still, when it is hard, its only you battling against nature isn't it, when you say, people are poor, on the whole, its (inaudible) farming, but you don't have the crime, probably because your not living on top of each other...It's that living, you know, living in your high rise blocks, you just feel too claustrophobic. Whereas in the country...I've always felt that if you can go somewhere where you can see space, somehow it makes you feel, and your problems feel small, and you realise they are not that important (7.2).

So notions of the countryside as idyll can exist alongside notions of poverty and deprivation. It still is a better environment than the urban if you are poor, and some of the elements of idyll, such as space, are still available, even though other aspects of life may be difficult. Such ideas tie in closely with material already discussed in Chapter 3 concerning the critical discourses which consider the hidden nature of rural problems. Not only may notions of idyll conceal problems, but if they are considered, the problems are seen to lessened or off set by the benefits bestowed by the idyll.

7.1.3 'The Village Children': (cohorts, gangs, trouble, heroes)

I have already commented in Chapter 6 that I feel the children of the village are a major area of 'common ground' within Allswell. To an extent, this is reflected by the construction of 'the village children' as some sort of collective group, or even project. Part of the view of Allswell as a childhood idyll is that the children are 'village children', that they have the chance to mix with and play with other children, and also the wider community, and that this has benefits. Gary told me

> Generally you'll find that kids in this village are really quite a self-confident bunch, so I think that ability, that confidence that they have from having their element of freedom has obviously, probably rubbed off (13.5).

This is not ubiquitously so; there are plenty of differences within that common ground, and also for most of the time 'the village children' are divided up into a number of family and multi family units in the course of their everyday lives, but there still is a feeling of some symbolic and practical village unity, which in some cases involve the notion of the village as a family with family loyalties, and references to such appeared regularly in the interview texts.

> *(A number of people have commented on the idea that the children of different sort of ages do play together)*...They do, very well...(because) I think probably the age span is covered, because there is a smaller clan - probably a good feeling of loyalty, almost like a large family (13.5).

> there have been times when they've (the children) been, um, protective of other people in the village, *(how do you mean?)* well you know they come from Allswell so you've got some sort of responsibility towards those people, you know, they're on the same bus, or something - "I can't stand them, but there're on the same bus as us (laughing), don't want anything to go wrong", *(some sort of village loyalty?),* Yes, I think so (24.1).

Events such as the May Day Fete, and the Village Social, serve to deliver both the practical and symbolic ideas of 'the village children'. Figs 7.1 - 7.5 show respectively; a May Day May pole practice session in the village hall car park; a sign referring to the 'village children' and their need of the car park as a practice space; the cover of the May issue of the parish magazine which is illustrated by drawing of children dancing around a May pole, and finally two shots of the May pole dance at the Fete. Also at the May Day Fete, and at the 1995 VE Day (which replaced May Day for that year), the children feature in other key foci of these events, such as taking part in organised sports/games (fig 7.6). Similarly the Village Social always has a performance by the village children organised by a group of parents. Figs 7.7 - 7.10 show the village children, split into three age groups, performing at the 1996 village social, while those not involved sit on the floor in front of the stage.

Fig 7.1 May pole practice in the village hall car park.

Fig 7.2 A sign referring to the 'village children'.

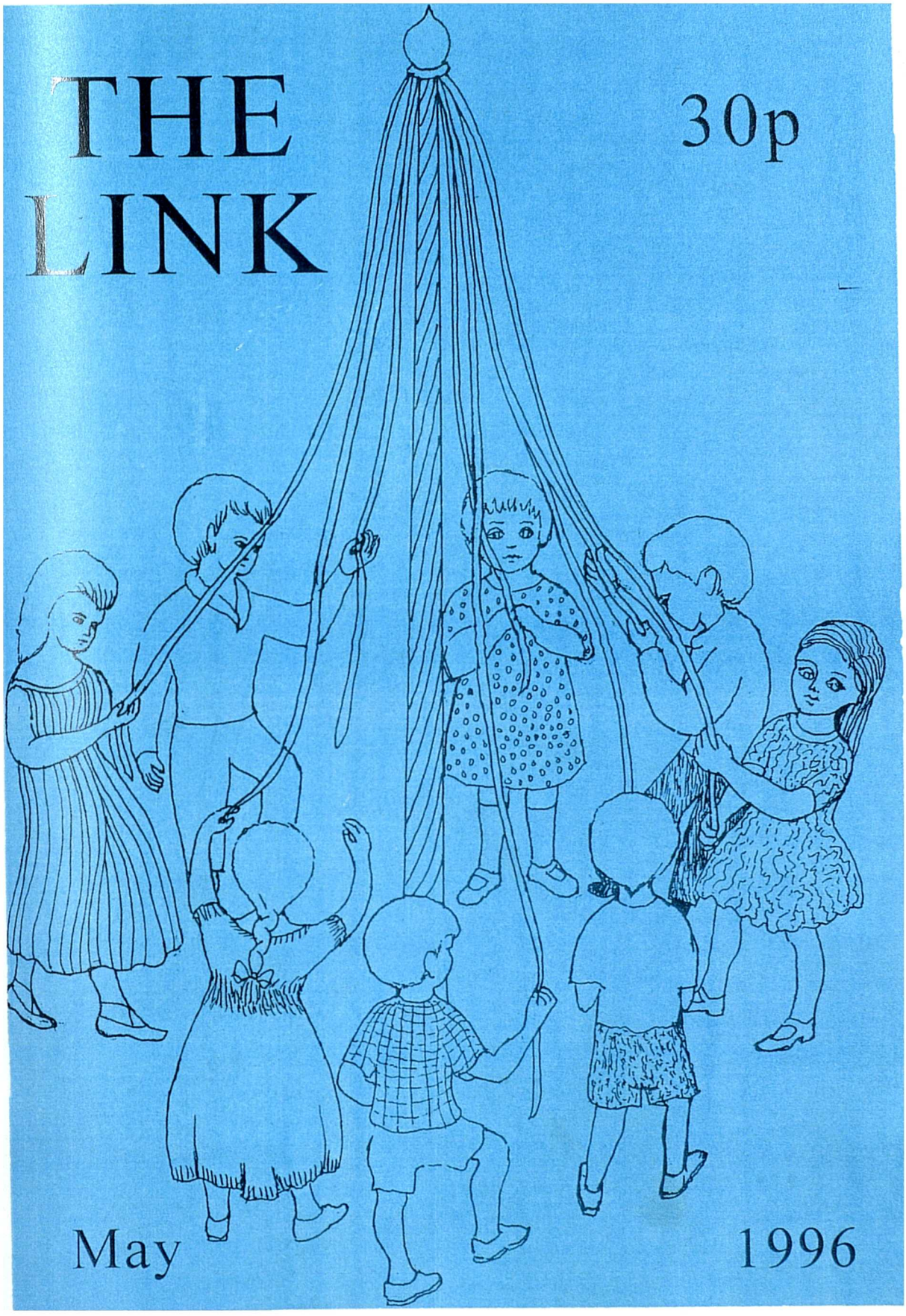


Fig 7.3 Cover of the May 1996 parish magazine.

Fig 7.4 The May pole dance at the May Day Fete (1996).

Fig 7.5 The May pole dance at the May Day Fete (1996).

Fig 7.6 Children's sports at the VE Day celebrations (1995).

Fig 7.7 The young children performing at the village social - dressed as farmers (1996).

Fig 7.8 The 'middle years' children performing at the village social (1996).

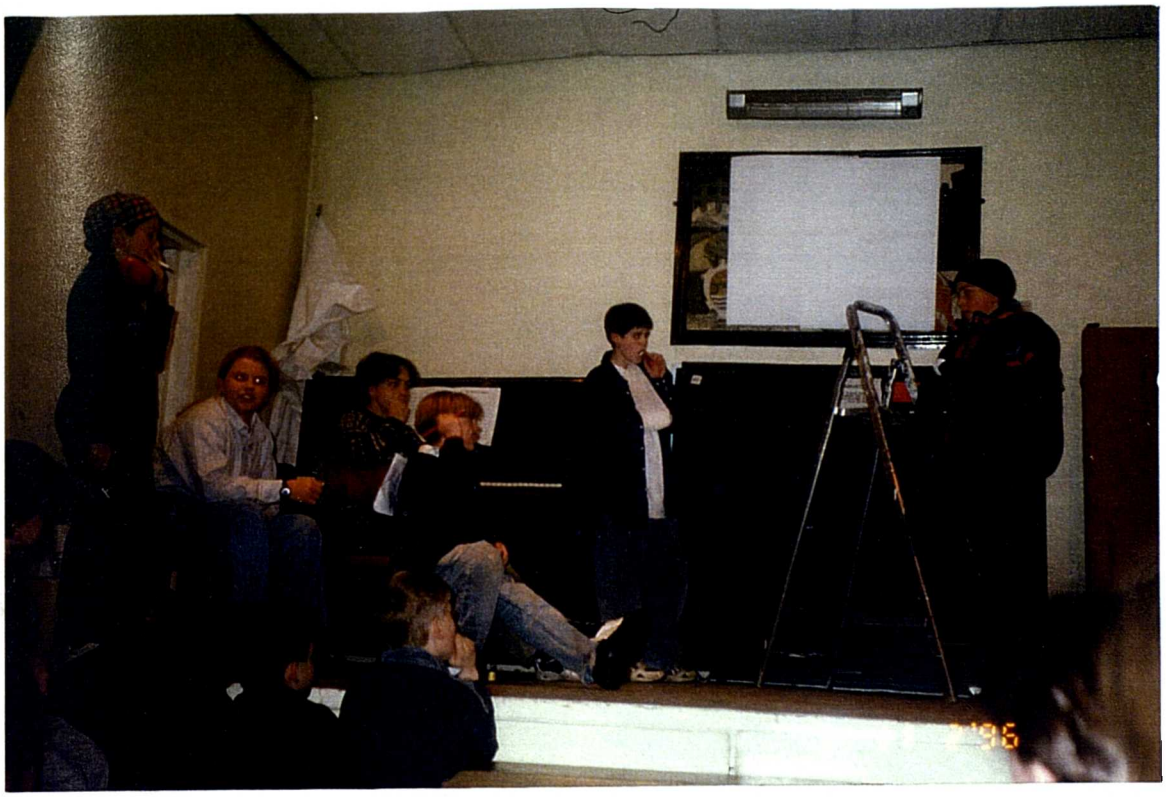


Fig 7.9 The older children performing at the village social (1996).

Fig 7.10 The village children as audience at the village social (1997).

Notions of 'the village children' also appear in other, more sporadic events, After a good fall of snow (quite a rare occurrence in Allswell over the last few years), sledding sessions are spontaneously convened. In early 1996 there was such an opportunity and many of the children, and some adults, rendezvoused at the traditional sledding field for morning and afternoon sessions and one father remarked to me 'I do love these village things' (fn # 7)[4]. Also on the event of a village wedding, the local children who are not attending the ceremony 'traditionally' tie up the gate, and refuse to let the newly weds out of the churchyard until the best man throws a handful of silver coin to send them scrabbling away from the bound gate. Networks operate to ensure children turn up and parents and other villagers also come and watch this symbol of village children (Fig 7.10).

COHORTS

Above I have indicated that this construction of the village children as some sort of collective group, was largely symbolic and imaginary, with only a few annual and other more random events where this was materially manifested. I also said that

[4] The annotation (fn # -) refers to the field notes as opposed to interview transcripts.

Fig 7.11 The village children tying up the church gate to prevent a newly wed couple leaving the church yard until money is thrown.

much of the time they were split up into family or otherwise constituted groups. One of the main structures from which these are formed is age group, and here there are much more frequent and practical constructions of collectives of village children. Generally within the village, children of similar ages play together and share other aspects of their lives. This is cross cut by patterns created by the attendance of differing schools, and also the micro geographies of the village. It is also qualified in an important way which will be addressed below.

Iris said she saw these age cohorts as ' quarter generations - because it's every sort of four years or five years isn't it' (5.24), and that she had been talking with someone else in the village about how as a long term resident one could watch groups of children growing up together. These groups - which rely initially on contact via parents, but become more self regulating as they get older - will be first formed by attending toddlers group together; going to local nurseries and schools together; and all the social life that revolves around lift sharing, child-care sharing, baby sitting, birthday party circuits, and just playing together on regular basis. Most of the parents, and I am one, are keen for their child/children to be part of this village

cohort for all sorts of reasons, which range from the practicalities of child care, through the worries of child development, social status within the village, to wider ideological objectives. It also relies quite heavily on notions of likemindedness in that you are happy for your child to spend perhaps quite a lot of time elsewhere, because the value and practice differences they are exposed to are not irreconcilably different from those of your own.

One aspect which emerged from the interviews which had not surfaced in my more general considerations of country, or more accurately, village life, was the considerable value people put on children of different ages playing together; the blurring of the cohort distinctions set out above. It seemed very important to some that the limited number of children within the village, coupled with the community or 'family' spirit, encouraged children of quite differing age groups to play and mix together. Margaret (Smith) told me,

> well I first noticed it two years back, at a Village Social, which was sort of a family affair, I suddenly noticed all the teenage girls - instead of kind of standing around being conscious of their appearance, as I think teenage girls might in any other situation, and trying to attract boys to dance with them - were dancing with the little kids, and that seems to go on all the time. Like I said, Liz and Rob (her children, 15), and the rest of them made that tree house for Jack and Ben who were sort of ten years younger than them at the time. There seems to be more of a family sort of grouping (8.4).

Linda also referred to this, and began to explain its importance to her

> because the children in the village are a limited number, of their own ages, children actually have to interact with children of other ages, which doesn't have to occur (in the town). *(And you think that's good?)* Yea, I think it's quite good that you have to interact, you know, you learn to interact with those younger and older than you, and I think that's quite a healthy thing just generally (3.21).

Margaret (Fields) echoed such ideas

> That's one of the other bonuses of being in a place like this, is that you go across the age range, (in child interaction). (21 .4).

This was seen as at once teaching the older children responsibility and confidence while at the same time bringing the younger ones on by example. Again the notion was that in urban areas, children would mix more exclusively with those of their own age and become more remote and autonomous, and consequently again more difficult to monitor or control, or even understand.

HEROES

Intriguingly in some cases it was possible to trace chains of 'hero worship' between older and younger boys within the village which had emerged out of this inter-age

interaction. James (now 15), when he was younger, I was told, used to hero worship Kevin Hislop, who was 4 years older than him, (and 'very nice to him'). In turn, James was worshipped by Ben who is now 9. Ben, and his friend Jack who is also 9, now quite often play with Sam (our son) and Christopher, our neighbour's child, who are both four. The latter think this totally wonderful. I have not heard of similar patterns between girls in the village. (It is difficult to see the implications of this but there may be issues of gender characteristics and possibly the clearer role boys have in the country childhood idyll than girls).

GANGS

It is only a small step to see these cohorts as gangs, and as Margaret (Smith) said, 'the gangs are what make it so much fun' (8.4). Jane, when anticipating what her five year old daughter might get up to in the village when a bit older said

> Also the idea, some of the children meet around the village green don't they. That would be nice (7 3)

But as individual children are seen as innocent, the gangs themselves, which are often a symbol of trouble and childhood being out of control, also become innocent within Allswell. Gary felt that this was because in 'a village' they are always occupied.

> Well because I think in a village they don't 'hang around', they are always doing something. There is always something for them to do. They never have to hang around, they are never idle, they are never without activity. Which (again) is a key thing because they are - they will finish a game of football, and will go looking for tadpoles in the stream (13.5).

While Victor, another father, felt that 'if you go into most shopping centres in any city now, you see loads of young teenagers sitting around the municipal fountain' (3.22), and these might have a 'threatening air' to them, where as he felt this was not so of the teenagers who sometimes gathered on the green in the village.

TROUBLE

There was not a complete denial of trouble, I was told of couple of stories about when gangs of children had clearly done something that met with the wrath of either their parents and/or the village more generally. One of these involved children repeatedly knocking on the door of a house and then running away, which does not seem that terrible, but a mother whose husband was working away from home was the particular target, and in the end - 'there was a general sort of, village sort of, somebody on everybody's behalf had a go at... (the culprits)' (8.10). On another

occasion while a village function took place in the hall, a young child got tied up in the telephone box by some older children and became quite frightened. His mother told me

> so I tore out...I absolutely went for them on the spot, and in front of a large number of people. And of course I then went home and rang their respective parents, but you see it was instant justice and within a week we were all friends again (5.22).

Another story involved a girl of about ten who was encouraged to take drink from an Aunt's house which she frequently visited, by some older girls who had a den in which they used to have drinking sessions. When this was discovered, the relationship between the younger and older girls was quickly curtailed.

But there was also an air that some trouble was almost part of the childhood idyll, and if the butt of the trouble happened to be those who did not fit into the village in some way this made it even more so. Iris recounted how -

> One family who were greatly disliked by one and all, for various reasons - they thought themselves very grand .. Anyway the village children took against them, the then gang..(list of names familiar to me as people now in their twenties and mostly living away from the village)...used to knock on the door and run away; and the other thing they used to do was to dance naked on the skyline (excitedly pointing) there, and old Taylor used to get enraged at these silhouettes, they always did it at twilight you see when the light was coming from behind (5.23).

And Sue (Lloyd) told me -

> Joe (15) has done some wicked things up the valley, actually recently he went up with a rubber boat and things like:..he tries - Joe will push, push the limits a bit more, he'll try to do things and - frightened -he'll see someone coming and whip off, or something (24.1).

7.1.4 'Children are Free Spirits': (freedom, space, outdoors and adventure)

A key factor in perceptions of Allswell as a good place for childhood is the idea that the children are free, or more free, to get outdoors, and to exploit and explore the space(s) of the village, and as a part of this 'have adventures'. Thus children can express themselves as the 'free spirits' they are seen as. Freedom for children, and the family as a whole, was cited by one respondent as a key factor in moving to the village after having previous houses in more built up environments.

> We had several houses in sort of typical housing estates in town and wanted a bit more freedom for the children to grow up in...we didn't want the congestion of a housing estate, ... we didn't want to be hemmed in any longer (18.1).

Another was confident that

> there is definitely more space and freedom in that respect (for children in Allswell) (3.4).

Again, as in the above quote, the notion of the degree of freedom children have in Allswell was often built in direct comparison with the freedom city children might have. Many parents speculated on how their child/children would be allowed less freedom if they happened to live in a city rather than Allswell.

> I think - even at seven, if I lived in a city I would be reluctant to let my child just disappear of into the city for the day. I would certainly not like them to do it in fact. And yet you'd happily open the door and let a seven year old disappear off up into the field or to the barn or something, wouldn't you? And if you think in a city its only you know, a square mile or a mile which is fifteen minutes walk, you can go all over the place and you could be in all sorts of trouble, whereas here, you know, fifteen minutes walk takes you to the top (the top of the valley). You know it's not that far (6.2).

> They are naturally allowed more freedom (in Allswell), and we can relax that they can have that element of freedom more so than they could do in a city situation. (13.5).

One respondent described her seven year old son as a 'free spirit' and to explain this she described his use of space.

> well, Jim I suppose, he's always been - goes off, you know- *(right, goes off where?).* I don't know, he just goes- its changing all the time I suppose. When he was little he was always into, you know mischief, not mischief -exploring, any adventure - he'd go. And he would have no problem going up on the field now, and even then (when he was younger) going and having a look, and going off (by) himself, *(sure),* and he just likes to be - like yesterday we came back, and he ran all the way up to Jane's...And that's him, *you know, sees the space and ssshhh (noise expressing dashing) - gone* (10.2).

In Chris and George's (Nutbrown) list of 'pro's and cons' for moving to their current house, which is quoted at the start of this section, the first item on the 'pro's list is 'space' and the last states 'Children are Free Spirits'. Space and freedom are critical in this view of children, because they cannot be seen as free spirits if they have no space to be free in, or they are restricted from using space. But there are complications here which are explored further in subsequent sections on the structuring of children's lives. If space and freedom *per se* are key constitutes of a childhood idyll, the 'feral children' of inner city estates as reported in the media, would be considered as having a childhood idyll far beyond those in Allswell in terms of freedom and spaces to roam. But this is clearly not how things are seen. Only certain types of spaces are suitable for children to 'be free' in. This immediately brings in an element of control which challenges the notion of freedom. Another basic point is the age at which children can be free. As Linda put it, when considering the village children,

> I think there is an age group of children who are too young to be allowed to roam free (6.1).

In this case this was about seven and under, but the assumption within the statement is that beyond that age the children do 'roam free' and that it is acceptable, in fact desirable, in the village. Although the age at which children are allowed to 'roam free' or at least go beyond the immediate confines of the house and garden, varied according to a whole range of factors - for example; position of the house in relationship to road/suitable open space; perception of parents; gender; sibling relations - there was a general feeling that this age threshold would be younger in the village that in other less auspicious places of childhood.

OUTDOORS and ADVENTURES

The freedom I have been considering is essentially spatial freedom, where, and where not, the children can go, (relatively) unsupervised. There are clearly other elements of freedom, including behavioural (what can be done); temporal (for how long); social (who with); technological (what with); and so on. But it is spatial freedom that is initially now considered. This really means outdoors, and beyond the garden, (although there is an idea that gardens in the country are generally bigger than those of urban and suburban areas, and thus provide most space in themselves). Gwen told me

> There's no space is there (in cities), if you were living in Bristol, then they'd come home to their garden, ~~and then they may end up watching the television a lot more~~, or ~~playing with the~~ computer, or whatever, because the options are fewer, so hopefully when Jim's more - well he does, he comes home, and they're (with his younger brother) just careering round, or I take them out for a walk, or something like that (10.5).

Chris and George held very similar views to Gwen

> I think children that live in little sort of boxes in towns have to come home from school and sit and watch the ~~telly because the parents don't want them entertaining in the house~~, and things like this, and there is nowhere else for them to go, whereas ours come home, they put their wellies on, (they ~~don't in this weather (very dry)~~), but they are off down into the woods and doing their own thing (18.8).

In all the interviews with parents with older children, (six or seven upwards), there were stories of how the children do, or did, go out into the fields; play in the stream; make dens; play in the barns; visit the woods. For example Sue (Lloyd) told me

> They (her four children) tended to go up the valley, which is up there where the lakes (sites 10/11/12) are... They used to just go up and mess around. There was a tree that went across a stream, and where there's a second lake up there, they used to jump - there was a string - and they used to jump ***over,*** just ~~sort of mess around, they were prepared to go that far~~... ~~We used to~~ go with them to begin with, but then would say "oh let's go up", (and they would go up on their own)....They go through stages, I ~~remember there being a stage when everyone played in the~~ barns behind you, on some hay. (24.1)...Joe, goes of sometimes with his friends to the woods down by the Greyson's across the fields and down - (24. 2).

In Chapter 2 I stated that being outdoors was a perquisite for many elements of notions of a country childhood idyll, not least adventure. And this is certainly so in the perceptions of the parents of Allswell. Chris stated about their children's walk through the fields to see Jack and Ruby in the village.

> Yes its a great adventure to them, to go down through the woods and meet at the other end...They almost see themselves as the Famous Five sort of going off on an adventure. *(Have they read all that sort of thing?),* one of my children has read lots of Famous Five books. *(George* re-enters the room). We were just talking about walking back and forwards to (Jack and Ruby's)-- -- and considering themselves a bit like the Famous Five- *(I mean do they actually say that or do you?).* No, no, they are, I mean that's what they believe (18.3).

Perhaps to justify this Famous Five link, I was then told of a caravaning trip to the Forest of Dean, 'where they went off with this little boy and he thought, with our four children and a dog that *definitely was* the Famous Five, and they had a wonderful weekend going off on little adventures (18.4). Chris after the conclusion of our interview also told me how they had all recently been on holiday in the lake district and for the children it had 'just been like 'Swallows and Amazons'. This and other examples which are quoted in different contexts, do show that some parents make quite direct links between their children's childhood and some of the most popular imaginary constructions of country childhood adventures.

Margaret and Ted told of other types of adventures their son and a friend had had

> Gary has taken them shooting down in the woods, hasn't he, and thing like that? *(shooting?)* well I don't know shooting what exactly, (***crows, birds, rabbits***[5]. Sue, daughter), crows I think *(what with, air rifles?)* Yea. Which I'm not to hot on, but there again *(what; just from a - ?),* well from both points of view really, safety and conservation. I'm not too keen on it from either side. And I think they like the woods, so they go down there, and they got lost the other night didn't they? *(Who got lost?)* Walter and Will. *(Did they think they were lost?).* (***They weren't lost but we had lost them. We started to get slightly worried, because we tried in all the usual places, and they're not to be seen.*** Ted) (21.3).

7.1.5 Innocence: (too innocent)

Alongside freedom as a key way of seeing childhood in Allswell, innocence also emerged as a key construction. As will be shown this closely ties into the more generalised constructions of rural childhood idylls already explored, and with wider constructions of childhood in general, but there are other developments of it which emerged within the research, notably that children in Allswell could be in danger of being too innocent, or too unworldly, and thus ill-equipped to deal with the harsher realities of life beyond the village. Also although the village is seen as a place of where the innocence of children can remain relatively unscathed, it was pointed out

[5] Where more than one person was present at an interview and another voice comes into the text these are indicated by ***bold italics*** and the speaker is identified.

that they do in some cases have close contact with processes of sex, birth, and death through their contact with nature and agriculture. These forms of knowledge are usually seen as the currencies which are the demarcations between childhood and adulthood, but in this case, as initially explored in Chapter 3, these forms of knowledge can apparently be assimilated into notions of country childhood idylls without compromising them.

Margaret (Smith) told me how she had been waiting for her teenage children to cease being children through what amounts to a loss of innocence, but how living in the village has postponed this growing up.

> I just feel that Robert and Liz who are now fifteen and a half, for the last two or three years I have been thinking, well this is the last time they are going to have a good old fashioned summer where they could climb trees and have picnics in the field - well its gone on a lot longer than I expected it would, and on the one hand they are growing up, and Liz is quite sophisticated and quite trendy, and when she is in school, I think she is indistinguishable from her friends who are town kids, most of them. But when she comes home she kind of puts that off and goes back to being a tomboy[6], and as I say, for the last two or three years every summer she has pitched a tent out in the field and spent a few days sleeping out there, and it wasn't long ago when she and Robert built a tree house for Ben and Jack, and these are things that I read about in books when I was a child and never did for a start, and secondly, I think that by the time I was a teenager I would have lost interest in that whereas they are still doing that (8.1).

Such ideas of children in Allswell staying children longer where also echoed by Sue, who said

> They do end up growing up rather quicker in the city... ours were quite happy to grow up quite slowly (24.3).

Iris speculated that the perceived prolonging of childhood, which she also felt her son James had benefited from through growing up in Allswell, could be down to reduced peer group, and adult pressure, and as a consequence the older children could continue to indulge in activities which would be regarded as childish, and illustrated this by saying

> nobody will, hardly anyone, would make a derogatory comment about a teenager rearranging some stones to, you know, bypass a little stream or something (5.19).

Again this was echoed by Sue

> They still enjoy doing things which are very immature, swinging on rope or whatever, you can go on enjoying it without there being any hassle about it (in Allswell) (24.3).

In Valentine's (1997a) research, such notions of prolonged innocence and hence childhood also emerged, with one of her interview subjects saying 'I think they can be kid's longer can't they' (in the countryside) (p. 6). Mirroring the quote from

---

[6] The notion of the younger village girls being 'tomboys' is quite common and is considered more closely in section 7.1.9.

Margaret above, Valantine was told how children would change their behaviour, and the age of their behaviour, when they were either in the town or the country. One woman had noticed that her nieces, when in the village, will

> play games, silly games, and laugh and have fun, whereas they never act like that in Chesterfield, (local town), it's nice because they come here and go back a stage, and have a bit of fun and play childish games, which they should be playing at twelve you know (ibid).

So in these cases there are indications that parents interpret their children as, in effect, oscillating from being still child like when in the country, to being grown up when in the town.

Jane although generally agreeing with such notions, was keen to qualify them by stressing not all cities were the same in their effects of shortening childhood

> well, people always say, that they loose their innocence quicker, because you do tend to have more violence and corruption in the cities. Life is harder isn't it. *(Do you think that's true?)* Yes, I do, (Then qualifying) - not all cities, I wouldn't say all cities, and only some parts of cities....if you think of New York, or the poor areas, life is hard, you fight for your existence and you do loose your innocence quickly (7.2).

Amanda, who had moved from an inner city area with her husband John and two children in 1992 , said

> well, you see, he (Jack) couldn't be a wild thing in Crompton Road (their old address) without people telling him off and whatever, whereas out here he can, can't he (9.4).

This confirms notions addressed in Chapter 4 that children being wild in the city are seen as 'feral' - dangerous and out of control, whereas in the country wildness can become innocent (natural), or at least harmless. Amanda had also said

> they can't do wild things in the city can they without, without sort of damaging things...Jack running around with a huge stick (here) sort of, it looks funny rather than menacing doesn't it (9.4).

TOO INNOCENT

Perhaps the strongest indications of how most parents saw childhood in Allswell as being innocent was the fact that some saw it as too innocent, and were keen that that children should be exposed to the wider world for the sake of education, and also in terms of being able to cope when they were beyond the village, particularly in urban settings, and also when they eventually left the village to go to college or get work. Linda told me

> I Know that I feel very concerned that I don't want Christopher to be an innocent for - you know - until he grows up. I want him to be aware of what goes on in cities, and I want to try and guide him to - that he understands what's right and wrong, and what's good and evil, so if he knows there's violence goes on, that he has some measure of being able to understand why or what, how to deal with it. Because I felt very much at nineteen that I was just an innocent launched into the world and it was just bewildering to me...I think nowadays you could fall in - easily fall into a trap of being - you know - thinking, oh we'll go out to this nice middle class idyll and bring up our

> children, and keep them away from the awful, you know, media advertising, and I don't think you'd be doing them an enormous favour (3.28).

Victor, Linda's husband and Christopher's father also told me

> I think one of the disadvantages I suppose for a child living in a place like this is just coping with themselves in a city environment, and moving around in it, (*what when they actually end up in one?*). Well, if you said to children, well, you know, get on a tube and go x, y, and z, it would be a really quite frightening experience of being underground, moving along and wondering where the hell to get off (*but at what age?*), (Linda interjects, ***I would have thought 18 or 19),*** 18 or 19 certainly, or you know, or if it was Freddy (a neighbouring child who has recently left to go to university in a major city) (3. 37).

Margaret (Smith), whose children are older, and are well into the secondary school phase, said,

> I *was* worried about their ability to cope with the big wide world, but I have not known of any children who have failed to transfer successfully...(from primary to secondary school) (8.4).

The 'transfer' in this case, as in effect in many others, is when the children go from junior school to secondary school. Many will be moving from small, rural first schools to larger schools which significantly are often urban based and also predominately peopled by urban pupils. (This is not so much the case for village children who have attended private first schools in and around Bath). As Margaret points out, her fears were generally unfounded, and it interesting that parents of children in Allswell do feel that their childhoods are in some way cut off from the potentially corrupting, and ageing, forces of modern society despite the children's immersion in popular cultures particularly through television and also contacts through peer groups at school and beyond.

Again this notion of not being equipped to cope with 'the city' emerged in Bell's (1994) work on Childerley, but in one case, not only were the children not seen to be in tune with the ways of the city, but the parent also, and rather than being concerned by this, the parent (father) seemed to play up and celebrate this,

> (my children) don't understand the city. Every time we go up to London, they look at it and they just can't imagine ever living there and neither can I. So we're sort of country bumpkins, and we feel at home here and fish out of water when we go into the city, and feel the city vibes. I personally feel quite frightened by (the city) (p. 102).

Iris speculated that although village children or country children are not equipped for modern or urban life, their city counterparts are missing out on the knowledges of the countryside, which, as already considered, are generally heavily culturally weighted as essential for a complete childhood. Here she sees these relative incompetences as equal, but as is quoted later, she is in fact glad her son James is a country child who has to acquire city skills, rather than the reverse.

> I think it's an equi-thing because OK they (city children) may not know how you gather eggs or something, but James won't know maybe how the tickets work on the underground. Well he does actually, but you know the sort of thing, its half and half (5.30).

VILLAGE SCHOOL

This concern that the village is to parochial, too innocent, for the overall good of children is reflected in a number of parents *not* lamenting the lack of a village school, which is often a key symbol of village childhood. Gwen told me,

> In some ways I'm - I don't know if I'm pleased that there isn't one, (a village school), in a funny sort of way, because, we chose to go to Wellsdon because it's a middle sized school, I mean we should have gone to Withycoombe, but I felt it was too small, so I mean we would have been really trapped had there been a school here, in Allswell, ... and I mean, it wouldn't offer as much as a larger school really...The world would have been very small for them. And it's small for them at Wellsdon I think, or selective in a sense. So the leap to the secondary school will be quite big... so I wouldn't have wished for a school in Allswell really. Does that sound awful. *(No, no).* Their world would be so small wouldn't it, and in the world we have today, really, your trying to strike a balance aren't you. That we're not the only people in the world, and hopefully through that things will get a lot better in the future rather than trying to hone in too much on the door step you know (10.3).

In this quote, Gwen is almost guilty for not wanting a village school, as if in some ways she is denying a potentially key element of the rural childhood idyll, and in doing so is possibly getting out of step with the likemindedness of the place. But she was not the only parent who felt this way. When I asked Margaret and Ted if they wished there was a village school they also were at first hesitant in their reply - Margaret saying, 'Um 'I'm not sure about that really' and then Ted speaking with the agreement of Margaret, saying 'they would be *very* insular if they went to school here as well' (21.3).

Gary similarly told me

> I am probably glad, actually, there isn't a village school, because you would have more of a dilemma then really, you'd feel you ought to send your child there, but what happens if you don't feel it was absolutely right and ....Now that could create tension, (Avril, partner; ***Yes that would be a rejection***)...(Gary again), I think it would, the rejection would be felt quite badly (13.12).

Gary and Avril, like a number of other parents in the village send their children to private school. For this group, the lack of a village school means that they do not face the problematic situation set out in the above quote; of having to reject the village (state) school through their choice of somewhere else. This in effect eliminates quite a potentially divisive feature from the village - a potential split between those families who children attended the village school, and those who go elsewhere. So although the shutting of the school in Allswell was seen as a severe, even fatal blow for the community by some longer term and life long residents (as will be considered later in the section on changes to the village), for many of the

newer residents, the lack of a school in this way actually enhances the possibility of a semi - cohesive, part time community.

This view of Allswell as a childhood idyll, but which lacks a whole raft of things which are now seen as necessary, if in some cases not altogether desirable, for the effective bringing up of children; when linked with the more mundane point that the children's lives - through schools, friends and family - extend well beyond the village, means that it is now not seen as a complete childhood environment in either qualitative or quantitative terms. This is not as it as was in either the autobiographical memories of, say, Lee and Thompson, or the imagined childhood of Crompton's William and his gang of friends. In Lee's *Cider with Rosie* the village and those neighbouring it were likened to ships in the landscape, and the roads and tracks which did link them were seldom used. The children basically spent the vast majority of their lives in the village both socially and spatially. Similarly in the William stories, the hero's world rarely extends beyond the village, and when it did, for holidays for instance, this was seen as no more than an unwelcome break into his personal childhood idyll. Allswell, as a childhood idyll, becomes a base, or a resource which is exploited in much wider ranging childhoods. Parents often said they wanted the best of both worlds for their children and this is considered further in section 7.3.

SEX, BIRTH AND DEATH

When discussing notions of innocence Iris pointed out that although children in the village were in 'some senses' innocent, - 'a certain innocence (which) is cherished' -

> on the other side, they see life in the raw, they see birth and death, for instance, and mating, ~~which they probably~~ don't ~~in~~ Islington or Camberwell and I think they are quite matter of fact about it (5.6).

This ties in with the suggestion made earlier in Chapter 3 that the innocence of the rural and nature can absorb issues of sexuality, and here also has been added mortality and birth. Many of the children living at our end of the village have witnessed the birth of lambs and calves at Manor Farm. Both can involve the attachment of string to the protruding front feet of the foetus and then strenuous pulling, especially in the latter case of calves, by the person aiding at the birth. It is quite a traumatic spectacle, which seen close up is regarded as a sensitive issue[7].

[7] Remember the Benneton Colours poster advertisement which showed a newly born baby, still covered with blood and mucus and attached to the umbilical cord, which had to be withdrawn after adverse reaction?

Carol, two years resident in the village after moving from Pinner, London, I know has been quite keen to get to see the lambing and or calving with her two sons, and Jane, who has taken her two daughters to see the lambs in the barn, told me

> we went and he pulled a lamb out once. *(you saw all that then?)*, yes, That is very nice (7.4).

Margaret, who has already been quoted as saying her children's childhoods had be prolonged by living in Allswell, also told me, how from an early age, her daughter had helped her father with the lambing on Manor Farm, and

> 'you know, assisting with the delivery as well, so they have been exposed to the facts of life and all this, and all the gory details (8.6).

With lambing, and also with livestock farming more generally, there is always some casualties, and the odd corpse will confront children if they visit the farmyards often enough. In addition to this, our children, (and others of the many households with cats as pets), have witnessed the killing and eating of mice, birds, rats, and rabbits, at quite close quarters, (often as crunching sounds from under the children's beds in the middle of the night, as the cats bring their prey in through the cat flap). They have also encountered dead moles and shrews on our lawn, which the cats catch but do not eat. Although cats also hunt in other areas, their rural catch seems much more prolific and varied. (I can only remember our cats when they lived in Bristol catching one or two blackbirds).

These processes of procreation and death, and ideas of them, are seen potentially as threats to the status of childhood, for they are key forms of knowledge that supposedly define adulthood, (thus the on-going controversies about sex-education). I have already shown how Humphries, Mack and Perks (1988) see the 'End of Childhood' as being precipitated by the lowering of the age threshold of sexual awareness, and I suggested then that in fact the rural has the capacity to, in some ways, assimilate sex into a vision of innocence, here I think there is some confirmation of this. Sex, (and as some of the research subjects added), birth and death, if seen as 'natural', and part of the 'cycle of nature' do not necessarily have to be in conflict with the innocence of childhood or the rural. In contrast to this Bell (1994) recounts that in Childerley the mating of cattle in view of one village house did draw complaints. In Allswell I have no evidence of such reactions. Kitteringham

(1975) in her account of 'country working girls in nineteenth-century England' points out that young girls and working women were often condemned as showing signs of 'female moral depravity'. This in part was due to indecorous dress and behaviour, but also through 'seeing sights amongst the beasts' (p. 129). This provides a reminder of how such constructions may have gender implications and how also the romantic/natural view of sex and nature in the rural and elsewhere, has always had a counter-point of more puritanical discourses with which it is in a shifting historical relationship.

7.1.6 Nature

Nature was a more difficult element to explore within the interviews, although I am still confident that it is a another key element in the constructing of Allswell and the rural more generally as a idyll and a childhood idyll. As already quoted on Chris and George's list of 'pros' and 'cons' for moving to their present house, 'pro' no. 3 was 'learn about animals and vegetation'. In other quotes about Allswell as an childhood idyll, plants, animals, seasons, are all mentioned. In the quote from Polly who came to stay at her sister's house, she talked about he importance of learning about the birds and what crops were. Here there is an elision between nature and agriculture, the latter being seen, as already suggested, as a form of surrogate nature. Most of the interviews were punctuated with such references which interwove nature and agriculture, and examples of this have already been quoted. But when in the interviews issues of nature and children were addressed more directly, and I asked more specifically about the connections between children and nature, unlike other topics which were taken up and developed quite easily, this caused the research subjects to pause, and only then to tentatively speculate about the links between childhood and nature. When I asked Gwen -

> *(What about nature?)* (she retorted). *Hah, nature !* (Laughs), (pause), well yea, I suppose, in the loosest terms, I suppose yes. They don't - people don't do that these days do they, they go in their cars, and they do this and they do that and you try to show them, it would be so easy for them just to live, to be in the garden and to go to school and back again, so you try and open it all up you know... Living in a village could be very suburban....(10.4).

In my interview with Jane, she volunteered,

> and I'd love them to be in tune with nature, you know, notice, the plants, the birds (7.3),

So I asked

> *(why children and nature?).* (long pause), Maybe it's a little less complicated, (laughs a bit uneasily) I don't know,.. it has cycles doesn't it, you know spring will come. It is simple isn't it. Animals, eat, produce, sleep and die, whereas, you know, if your talking about humans you've got all those emotional interactions, and it's more complicated. The animal stories teach them that. Maybe children are closer to nature, and maybe that's because they are innocent (7.3).

She later returned to the subject

> I think also the good thing is, you know, you hope they have a respect for nature, an appreciation. I think also - I keep pointing out to Anne - little flowers or birds because I think if you appreciate those little things, it makes life - not so boring. You know, if you watch the seasons, it's - that's also why it's nice, you notice the seasons more in the country...If you are in the city you just go into your house anyway, especially if you live in a flat, you go into your house whether its rainy or sunny. It's also colder in the country (7.4).

When I asked Linda, after she had talked about her child being in contact with nature,

> *(why is it nice for Christopher to be close to nature, can you expand on that a bit?)*, (she replied somewhat defensively), well that's only my personal view (6.5).

I then pressed the issue - 'but what's good about nature?' again she demurred - 'that's a bit difficult' - but after further pressing offered;

> I think I possibly think that I like the idea that he understands nature and his surroundings because I feel it will have some influence on his attitudes to his culture and people and life really. You know if he realises that a flower out there is very beautiful and delicate and he can appreciate it, then one hopes that also it has a knock on effect, affecting other aspects of his view of what the world is and what - you know, I find immense peace in going outside and just looking at greenery and flowers on a sunny day and not looking at buildings and hearing noise, and I think that most people enjoy that. So I think it is something in human nature isn't it (6.5).

The last line above shows how this association of not only children but also people more generally with nature is deeply present within our cultural constructions of ourselves and our children. The association of children with nature is so ubiquitous that it rarely meets a questioning parameter. In work on urban childhood, such as that of Berg (1966), the disassociation of nature and childhood is seen as one of the biggest privations inflicted on children in such areas. I have already said that such associations are deeply shaded by the legacy of romanticism, but it is an area of study which needs much more in depth work than can be done here. As it has been argued that childhood as a vast cultural construction, is left mostly unexplored by academic, professional, popular and lay discourses, this association of childhood with nature is a sub-set and possibly symptom of such, and is consequently often unarticulated. It is, for example, very difficult to find academic studies on the influences of romanticism on constructions of childhood, and in empirical terms it was an area difficult to track down by the research techniques used, and here perhaps focus groups would have been more effective.

7.1.7 Agriculture As Spectacle

Agriculture is yet further a key ingredient of notions of country childhood in Allswell, particularly in that it is the provider of space(s), and spectacle, and as above links to nature. The spectacle is often of quasi-nature in the form of animals such as sheep, cows, and vegetation such as crops, hedges, trees, all these tied into notions of natural cycles of the seasons, planting, growing, cropping, birth and death. It also provides technological spectacle in the form of tractors, combines and other impressive looking machinery. These, along side animals, are another key feature of early children books, but these technologies are often anthropomorphized, or rendered soft and cuddly, or at least benign, and this is in sharp contrast to the issues of accidents involving children and agricultural technology which have been briefly mentioned in Chapter 3. Furthermore there is what I can only describe as rustic/pastoral spectacle where the actual processes of agriculture such as milking, barns full of hay, and the agriculture workers themselves, are seen as being of special value to the children of the village. Elements of agriculture which jar with these often traditionally derived images, such as crop spraying, artificial insemination, drug and anti-biotic injections, are not such welcome sights.

Many of the interview subjects talked of witnessing the pageant of farming unfolding in the lanes and field around the village, and many told of visiting the farm yards, often on a daily basis with their children when they were young. These are the farm yards which have in the last few years, either disappeared totally or otherwise declined in activity, so these accounts are considered more fully in the section on changes to the village, but quite typical of such accounts of visiting the farms was that of Jane who told me

> they love seeing the cows, and going around to Joseph's barn, *(do they?),* Oh yes, you know, if you say to Tessy, we're going to see the lambs, she says "bah bah" and she's ready, She's really into animals and all her first words are animals. That's because of what's available. If you look at children's books, even for the little ones, the majority are animal orientated (7.4).

For some, especially mothers at home with young children, such visits to the farms were a matter of daily routine. When I asked Margaret, - Can you remember Valley Farm when it was a farm, she replied, calling upon her daughter (Sue), who was present, for confirmation,

> It was a real routine, (to Sue) wasn't it? We used to, (Sue, aged ten, interjects, ***we used to go down every day***). - in the summer, mostly late morning, when they were taking them (the cows) back out, taking the bull out. Definitely every afternoon, about threeish (21.3).

Such associations between children and agriculture do shift with the age of the child. When children are young, in fact even at pre-toddler age, they are taken to 'see the lambs' and also 'the tractor'. This phase as agriculture as purely parent provided spectacle slowly is joined by agriculture as a activity resource when more mobile children are at first taken to climb on the bales, and the tractor, feed the lambs, and later when they are more independent, places to go and play and have adventures without parents in attendance.

7.1.8 Health: Toughness and Dirt

Allswell is generally considered a healthy place both in physical and psychological terms. As Joyce put it. 'The (lack of) pollution of course is a big factor' (11.2.). This feeling of the outdoors being healthy for children leads to a pressure on parents to encourage their children to 'play outside'. Jane told me

> *I know they should be outside.* One of my doctors once said his daughter is one of those travellers, and her children are outside all the time, and they are very healthy (7.3).

Not only is there is a notion that a country upbringing is mentally and physically healthy, but there is also an idea that it will toughen them up, not tough as in a 'street wise' sense, but rather more in the sense of physical and mental resilience.

> If they do run out around in the country, they get exceedingly dirty, they get scratched, bruised stung and bitten, but apart from that they don't seem to come to any harm (4.7).

And as Iris put it,

> In the countryside you think, if they're stuck up a tree, I'll go and get them in a minute (5.18).

This was prompted by her account of 'the trauma tree incident' which, by the way it was told, was obviously part of the stock of amusing anecdotes that most households hold. This one was about the weedyness of city children. In the story James's cousins and their parents were visiting from London, and

> although they're (the children) not spoilt brats or anything, but - 'oh look darling Karen, I think', (you know), ' perhaps she needs a little rest' and that sort of thing... - town children are always put into extra coats and gloves and whatever - Anyway, they had escaped into the garden, when George the husband flew in, saying 'darling, darling, catastrophe, Rachel is stuck in the tree house', which is by the gate, and there were bawls issuing from the hut, and I said 'oh, don't worry, every child gets stuck up there at some point' - 'you don't realise', he said, 'she will have trauma'...and this has become a by word, it is now known as 'the trauma tree' (5.17).

The notion of Allswell being physical healthy and toughening, is closely linked to the idea of spiritual or psychological health for children, and consequently a better place for development.

> I think it (Allswell) is more relaxing and I don't think you can develop spiritually under a lot of stress and I do think the town children, of whom I have some experience, because James's cousins on Peter's side are born and bred in Islington and Camberwell. They are more street wise. I don't think that they have got the tranquillity in them, that country children do seem to have (5.5).

Interestingly it is not so much that Allswell is seen as healthy because it is clean, but rather that the dirt of the countryside is seen as healthy or perhaps innocent, in the way that 'good honest dirt' will not do children any harm, and again, is more likely to toughen them -

> I think children should make contact with dirt, so to speak, and I think they'll be the healthier for it (5.18).

Again Iris's 'city cousins' stories provide a good example of such ideas. They would, she recounted

> have to wash their hands when ever they've patted the animals ...they are never without a cold or an allergy or something, and I think you can over-protect. You see I'm sure, that their parents in London wouldn't say now you've been up the escalator with your hands on the rail, you must go and wash your hands. They're much more likely to pick up something (5.18).

So here city dirt is seen as possibly contaminating rather than the healthy dirt of the rural, but intriguingly the city parents appear to think the reverse, and at that point it seems to be emerging that it is otherness which seen as contaminating, that which you are not used to, or which is seen as alien. For the city parent it is patting a cow, for the country parent it is the hand rail of an underground railway escalator.

7.1.9 Boys, Girls and Tom Boys

When I asked Margaret and Ted if they saw any differences between boy's and girl's experiences of Allswell they both at first thought there was not much difference

> *(Do you see that it's different for girls and boys, that there's different advantages or that they exploit the place in different ways?),* (long pause). (Margaret) I don't know really, I don't really notice any difference between them (Walter and Sue). (To Ted)- do you? (together) they both do -they do similar things really don't they, (yes) (21.4).

But then Margaret added that the village could not really provide all activity her son Walter needed but was more capable of fulfilling Sue's needs.

> Walter needs more activity level, and that why he goes out to things like the kid's sport or the Soccer Works, (training school) which are on at (local school), and I see that. With Sue, I don't see that so much, she very much sort of happy with a one to one situation, or a small group of friends, whereas Walter doesn't care who it is, as long as there is big lot of people and a lot of activity, (Ted), and there's a ball (21.3).

Earlier Margaret had told me, that she had given a greater degree of spatial licence to her daughter than to her son at the same age

> I don't let Walter go quite so far, because he hasn't got such a brilliant brain, enough to realise the dangers of things. Sue (his sister) was always more sensible (21.1).

Similarly Sue who has two boys and two girls said of youngest son

> but Sam was a bit of a Kamikaze kid when he was little, so we had to try a restrict him a bit (24.2).

Amanda, mother of Jack and Ruby thought the latter, although younger than her brother, was 'more responsible', then she qualified this,

> not more responsible, she is probably slightly more cautious...I don't think she would get up to much mischief (9.8).

Such constructions are, to an extent, in tension with the claims made so far that popular images of childhood idyll are predominantly male orientated. These exchanges led me to ponder if the changes and threats to childhood, had in some cases eroded the more physical, adventurous, spatially far ranging aspects of country childhood idyll, while the more social based community/village aspects, children mixing in the village, which are set predominately in domestic spaces, have remained more intact. Although there was a reluctance to admit this, and consequently some girls were considered to be tomboys, the more physical, adventurous ideas of childhood were more often associated with boys or maleness, and the latter with femaleness. Jane, who has two young daughters told me,

> I do believe that boys are different from girls, probably they would go out more, because they, I do think they need more physical - outlet. *(what, they'd want to go out more?)*, yes, I think probably, *(and would you be more prepared to let them as well do you think?)*, (laughing) I'd probably want them outside (7.3).

And Victor, father of Christopher, although initially saying that the traditional images of country childhood, (climbing trees, messing around in streams) did not have a 'masculine edge' to them then qualified this by saying

> it might be something that males tend to express themselves physically slightly more than young girls do (3.8).

Consequently there maybe a case for saying that the pressure on country childhoods has had more effect on what are often seen as boyhood activities rather than girlhood activities. Because boys are seen as more reckless and adventurous, they are more likely to get in trouble or danger, and so it is their activities which are more curtailed.

TOM BOYS

But counter to this line of thought another theme emerged, that of girls in the countryside being in some ways 'tom boys'. Such notions have quite a strong presence within some childhood literature, particularly 'George' in Blyton's *Famous Five* who always is wanting to be a boy. In her interview Linda told me about her relationships with the tom boys in other children's classics.

> I identified very strongly with the railway children...(in it) the middle child. I think its the middle child which is a girl, is a bit of a tom boy girl, and she is always chastised for her behaviour and what she - you know running of and getting filthy.. (*so did you get dirty?*) Me, oh yes, it was only when I was older that I started to get prissy about that sort of thing. I was probably filthy until I was about 19 and then I discovered - you know - men. (6.10), ...I loved Ann of Green Gables because she was a real tom boy (6.11).

Sue said of herself and her sisters -

> We were very tom boyish, we used to charge around the countryside (24.2).

I have already quoted Margaret who told how she saw her young teenager daughter as retaining, or reverting to, childhood status within the village, and how this was in the form of being a 'tom boy', (camping in the fields, building tree houses). When I asked Irene, whose daughter Wendy is 10,

> *(do you think there is a difference in girls and boys living in a village, do you think its better for boys or girls...because the idea maybe that a country childhood of sort of climbing and fishing in streams and that sort of stuff is - ?)* (She simply replied) well have you seen Wendy?.

So I asked, do you think she is a tom boy to which the answer was

> 'yes... I don't want her to be a sort of quiet little girl (12.13).

Intriguingly Anne Mellor (1988, 1993) has suggested that romanticism, as encapsulated in the six canonical poets, (Wordsworth, Colridge, Blake, Byron, Shelley and Keats), should be termed 'masculine romanticism', because firstly, a whole heritage of female romantic writing has been systematically ignored by literary criticism, but also because, and of greater interest here, the way gender is treated within (masculine) romanticism. She argues that Nature is identified as female and the female as Nature, and that the female is erased from discourse, (by a male gendering of both subject and object), 'she does not speak; she therefore has no existence' (p. 19). Also she reports that in Rousseau's work, particularly *Emile,* the female only is considered in a subordinate, almost abject, -('she should early learn to submit to injustice and to suffer the wrongs inflicted on her by her husband without compliant') - relationship to the male. I have already briefly considered that the country childhood idylls of literature and popular culture are often male

childhoods. If such constructions of childhood are in part a legacy of romanticism, as in fact are many of our attitudes to the countryside and the rural, (Blunden and Curry, 1990), perhaps there is little room for the female in these constructions. Consequently the only readily available identity for the female child is in the form of 'tom boy'. The 'natural' state of childhood is a wild innocent maleness. Any development from this in terms of certain forms of sexuality and/or other sophistications, - (Mary Webb's Hester was sexually active bur remained innocent because she was naive and unsophisticated) - was a form of inevitable corruption and retreat from the spiritual Eden of (male) childhood, for which the rural provides the material Eden in which it is played out. Such ideas may also be supported by attitudes to dress. A number of interviewees mentioned how in the country the children could wear any old scruffy clothes and no one cared. This indicated a freeness from sophistication, self-consciousness, almost a lack of self awareness in the contexts of modern (urban) sophistication. This dress code of the countryside for children is basically male.

7.1.10 Past Childhoods (elsewhere)

This last section can be seen as a twist in the tales told above, for what was strikingly common in the interviews is that although Allswell was seen as more or less a childhood idyll, childhood itself was not considered to be the idyll it used to be. Even here in Allswell the erosion of childhood is seen to have made inroads. Overwhelmingly this was through loss of spatial freedom, not through the loss of suitable space itself but rather through the increased control and curfews put on children due to various types of fear, and these are considered in more detail in the next section. There was also a strong concern that the innocence of childhood, and childhood itself was coming under pressure, both through the increased pressures on childhood, and also childhood's increased exposure to the problems and pressures of society more generally. These were seen as being transmitted through various media, childhood consumerism and the contact with the wider world through school, friends, and family, which has already been described as taking childhoods well beyond the village.

In many of the interviews people recalled the degree of freedom they had as children, the places they went and the things they did, and nearly always concluded that their children were a lot more constrained.

I was brought up on a ribbon development, which was effectively an 'A' road with houses, semi-detached houses, side by side running down one road, and the back drop to both those houses were fields, which now are no longer fields. But when I was a child, they were fields and in those fields there were cows and surrounding those fields were woods, in those woods were ponds, (*did you go to them?*), and I played in them, in the woods, you know, fished for sticklebacks, got frog spawn, and all that sort of business...(3.25).

Here 'and all that sort of business' implies I think, the idyll as a package readily recognisable as a cultural entity and therefore not needing further detailed listing. Victor then went on to describe his childhood freedom further.

I also cycled, um, probably two or three miles to my best friend... unaccompanied (3.25), ...I suppose by thirteen or fourteen I was riding, you know, ten, ten or fifteen miles, on the Wirral, you know I could cross the peninsula to the other side, on a bicycle, (*so you had quite a lot of freedom*), I had an enormous amount of freedom really (3.26).

As these other extracts show, the possibility of recounting their own childhood released a vivid stock of powerful memories many of which were favourable compared the fate of their own children.

We had sort of quite a long back garden and there were fields at the back but I remember sort of walking down the lane if you like. As I child I had a lot more freedom than I give my children now ...I'm sure if I lived here as a child I would have been allowed to probably go to the other end of the village quite freely. *(At what age?).* I walked to school, I remember walking going to school, junior school at seven by myself, which was a good half mile walk...I wouldn't dream of letting my children do that now...*(did you go out and about as well as walking to school. Did you go out and play?).* Oh yes, we used to go down this lane. I mean sometimes we would walk a good mile and I'm sure my mum had no idea where I was. *Everyone did it. It wasn't just my mother, if you like,* letting me out (14.11/12).

We had a den when we moved to Chichester, when I was about twelve... *just over the road.* There was a disused gravel pit with a couple of raised sections which had large trees growing on them, and there was a boys den and a girls den...and they were about a hundred yards apart and there was deep jungle...so in fact as kids we spent a lot of time blasting around in that (22.2).

We used to go down to the river my sister and I, I was older, I think I was *nearer* ten, eleven...*(so was that own your own?)* yea, we used to go, yea, down to the river. *(and just what, play?),* play, and we used to take a picnic...*(so your mum knew where you were?),* yea that's right. You didn't have to go through the town, you didn't have to cross roads if you like, you could go down, there was a way round, you could go on footpaths, and not meet any traffic, so we used to go on our own. Although I don't know if you do it these days though...*(Why?).* Well it's, you know, strangers and all that, weird people (10.2).

We used to go further afield, but not like the Enid Blyton books when you'd spend hours in fields and far away....There was a quarry just next to our house and we played there a lot, and actually there was a water tower just along, and we used to climb up the water tower. There was no fence on the top...My parents never knew what we were doing. But I think my mother was very laid back, never concerned. *(So you cant quite see yourself being like that?).* Well I wouldn't, well it was because you'd never heard about - well maybe it was just because you were a child - but it wasn't as violent. You hear about children being kidnapped (7.1).

Modern society seems to stop you from allowing your children out very far. As a child I always walked to school which was a mile and even from the age of sort of 5 or 6, and we don't allow our children to do that sort of thing any longer *(what sort of environment was that?).* That was really a small town...up in Lancashire, a small town on the edge of fields full of cows. *(Can you remember going to the fields and things when you were younger?).* Yes, we were forever building dams across farmer's streams and building dens and getting told off. It was a wonderful way of spending time (18.2).

> We used to go and play in a barn...it was used, so we used to go up in the hay loft, and then there was a bit of rope, you know, you could swing down on, then we used to go - cut through the back lane, which was bordered by fields, and go down to Jipp's Hill, where there was the stream, well, river, and fields all along, through there. *(Do you think your parents had any worries about your safety?)* Oh, yea I'm sure they did, but I don't think they often knew exactly what we were up to. *(Did you go out for quite long periods of time?)* Oh yes, we did. They new roughly where we were and who were with. *(What sort of age were you when you were doing that sort of thing?)*.. Probably Sue's age, between 9 and 11 I think. We used to also go down to the end of Park Road and through there, there was a cut down footpath...and we often used to go down there, we used to call it the Rumpty Tumps...and there were huge blackberry bushes and we used to make dens in these bushes and things (21. 2, Margaret).

> I spent most my school holidays out in the fields somewhere or other doing the usual sorts of things...Dens and whatever (21.2, Ted).

> They don't do as much, they definitely don't do as much as I used too.... We did all sorts of, we had certain trees we'd go across and climb, there was a hollow tree... Not in the city at all, we had fields beside us there, *(did you go into those)?* Yea, and we used to help with the haymaking and things like that, those are very fond memories, of playing in the haystacks. Oh, we just didn't have any fears, of anything. We would go along way. We would go off on picnics and treks by ourselves. I started going out and doing things more by myself without a parent when I was much younger, maybe five or something (24.1).

Many such accounts of past childhoods were set in classically rural areas but also in either urban fringe, suburban, or even small town settings. Interestingly some did speculate that such environments were possibly more conducive to childhood than Allswell or other more rural places.

> In some ways you think that maybe on the urban fringe, there's lots of sort of almost derelict land and wasteland the farmers have abandoned for some reason or other..(18.3).

Again this aspect of the interviews is closely matched with those carried out by Valentine (1997a) where she states that parents often illustrated their concern for the increased restriction on (their) children's freedom, 'with anecdotal accounts of their own idealised rural childhood' (p.12).

So although childhood in Allswell is valued and celebrated as being in some ways idyllic, there is an undercurrent that it is not as idyllic as childhood used to be, and in some cases not as idyllic as people anticipated or imagined it was going to be for their children. Comparisons with memories of past childhoods are a key way in which these concerns are articulated. When I asked Sue

> *(One of the things I'm quite interested in, is the actual use of the countryside beyond sort of like gardens, and things like that. Do you think the kids go out in the fields much?)* (She replied) Um, probably not as much as I would of expected them to (24.1).

In the next section others are quoted who express similar thoughts, which revolve around the idea that the actual lives of children in Allswell do not live up to the expectation of idyll which many people hold.

In her paper Valentine (1997a), points to a number of apparent paradoxes which she found in her research into perceptions of the country childhood idyll. Such paradoxes, or rather conflicting constructions are also evident in the material set out above. In essence, these paradoxes are generated by two powerful suites of constructions which complexly intersect with notions of country childhood idyll. The research into Allswell does show indications of the interactions of these notions which I set out at the beginning of Chapter 4. Firstly, notions of the countryside as being a childhood idyll, have been, and remain a powerful force within our culture. But this is caught in two vigorous relationships which themselves are at odds with each other, and this accounts for the paradoxes which Valentine's and this research has thrown up. On one hand, notions of country childhood idylls are maintained and developed through comparisons with the urban as being, a least, a potential childhood distopia, and at worst - and often reported as such in the form of inner cities - a veritable childhood distopia. While one the other, they are challenged and pressurised by notions of a general crisis in the status and condition of childhood, and these in turn are fed by nostalgic comparisons with past childhood idylls, particularly, past country childhoods. There are also professional and academic discourses questioning the notion of country childhood idylls, but these as yet have made little impression on lay, popular and even legislative discourses. It could be said that these conflicting sets of pressures are bearing on the two differing components of country childhood idylls. The *country* element is sustained through comparisons with the urban, and on-going more general discourses of rural idyll, attacks on which are still usually sporadic and specialised; the *childhood* element comes under pressure from the discourses about childhood. Currently the positive country *element* keeps in check the negative childhood element, so the notion of idyll remains intact, but is showing signs of strain.

The next section now tries to begin to unravel the structuring consequences these constructions of childhood within the village have on the lives of children.

7.2 STRUCTURING OF ALLSWELL'S CHILDHOODS

Having depicted above some of the key elements of how ideas of childhood are constructed by adults in Allswell, the purpose of this next section is to attempt to depict how children's lives are structured by these constructions. Initially I present some evidence that as parents do see childhood in Allswell as a form of country childhood idyll they actively encourage their children to live it out to some extent. This, along with the already mentioned fact that some parents chose to live in Allswell partly in order to give their children a county childhood, can be seen as quite direct, immediate, and in the latter case profound, structuring of children's lives. But clearly beyond these there are a whole host of other forces structuring of children's lives in Allswell as elsewhere. Key amongst these, and working counter to the living out of childhood idyll, is parental fear of various dangers to children. These concerns in Allswell, as already considered more generally, serve to restrict children's degree of freedom to a considerable (but varying) extent. Such concerns also put parents in a state of conflict and anxiety as they try to balance their children's living out of the rural idyll idea with the restrictions they feel bound to impose. Beyond these, other important structuring forces which also emerged are considered, in particular - degrees of familiarity within the community and within community/landscape relations; gatekeepers and their role in facilitating access to country childhood spaces; landownership; private property (attitudes towards ownership); and the (changing) micro-geographies of the village.

7.2.1 Performing the Idyll

As the majority of Allswellians think they are fortunate in where they live, - (Iris told Sue my partner that every time she drives into the village she stops at the top of the hill, looks at the view (fig 6.6) and gives thanks that she lives here) - the parents of Allswell also think they are fortunate in where they are bringing up their children, and that the children themselves are mostly blessed with those aspects of a country childhood idyll I have set out. I have already shown that some parents chose the countryside in general, and Allswell in particular, as a place to bring up their children. Once in Allswell - given the concerns and restrictions created by fear which are considered below - most parents, (I include myself within this analysis), although to differing degrees, make positive efforts to ensure that their children make the most of the idyll that they have been brought into by encouraging them to 'perform' it, or differing aspects of it. Perhaps the most vivid and symbolic examples

of this are the May Day May pole dance and the village children's performances at the 'Social', which I have already described. But this encouragement to perform the idyll also comes in many other less obvious forms and permeates everyday life of the village. It is also bound up with popular and commercial discourses of country childhoods which through their entanglement with specific domestic settings, are part of the structuring forces on children's lives in the images and values they put on countryside settings.

Parental/guardian encouragement of children to appreciate and live out notions of country childhood range across and/or combine such elements as; ensuring children integrate within the village community, both through participation in village events and more informal structures of association; encouraging children to get outdoors - for play, exploration, and health; encouraging children to take an interest in agriculture, nature, the local landscape and community. For example Sue (Lloyd) told me

> we (the family) always go for walks and things like that, and we always notice everything that's around, and I think that's one of the most obvious things, the changes in the countryside and the changes in what's going on, so they (the children) can see when the silage is long - or the grass is so long it's probably going to be cut for silage - so they won't go charging through there (24.1).

This is not to say that children are totally passive in these matters. For example, many, but not all, are very keen to socialise with other people in the village (especially other children), and also, many appear to desire the spatial freedom to roam beyond the immediate confines of house and garden, and within that, building dens, playing in the stream, playing in the barns, watching and being involved with other aspects of agriculture appear to be favourite activities. At this point the simple binary model of children's worlds being structured from without and experienced from within, which this work is initially based upon, begins to break down, or at least becomes complex. There must be a strong possibility that the positive light children often see the above activities in, is guided by the attitudes of the parents. At this point the experience from within, or at least how children are constructing their worlds, is itself structured from the 'outside'. These issues are addressed later, but for now it is sufficient to say that when parents are imposing these constructions of childhood on their children, either through direct action or more subtle forms of positive cultural weighting, it still leads to a structuring of the children's lives which is significantly embroiled with popular images of country childhood.

Amongst the parents interviewed there was some awareness that a romantic construction of country childhood was being imposed on the children, but this knowingness did not necessarily diminish the power of the notions or country childhood idyll parents held. Rather it was a recognition that such idylls *are* ideals but are nevertheless realisable to some extent. Gwen told me that she encouraged her two sons to go out into the fields which adjoined her garden, even when, as she put it, they might be more at ease staying in the garden.

> I positively encourage them to, you know lets go up in the field, and just run up there and run down, and all the rest of it, and if you don't do that, its just what they're used to isn't it, and they definitely feel more sure about being in the garden.*(Why do you encourage them to go in the field?)* I suppose its there - I suppose there's a romantic element to it, you know it's there that's why we are here, its lovely countryside, the country feel, there's more space (10.4).

Sue, who has already been quoted as saying her children did not range as far away from home as much as she had expected, or that she herself had done as a child said , 'I have encouraged them maybe to go off on bike rides' (24.3).

Polly, (the 'townie') told me how she had taken the opportunity of her stay in her sister's house to let her seven year old do the last part of a journey back to Allswell across the fields.

> I dropped Richard - came off down the road from Blackmead. The road by the field where the pond is, and I said to Richard, "well I'll drop you off here and you can go over the fields". *(Did he like that?).* Oh he though it was wonder - he thought it was brilliant. *(Why do you think they enjoy it, do they see it as a big adventure?).* Oh yes (19.2).

Violet who comes to Allswell to stay in her parent's cottage where she her spent parts of her childhood said

> I bring my children here as much as anything because I remember how marvellous it was for me...There's just something about the place that children actually love. I bring my children here as much as anything because I remember how marvellous it was for me...There's just something about the place that children actually love (22.2).

Mary-Jane Greyson (age 13) told me 'mum doesn't like if it's sunny and the boys are sitting in front of the television, - "oh you've got all this wonderful land, go and play on it' (ci, 6.1)[1]. 'Mum' confirmed this story telling me that if that were watching some 'rubbish' on television, she would tell them to get outside into the open air (fn # 51). Such an attitude is common amongst most parents in the village, particularly in the summer time. The concern (some) parents have over their children watching

[1] An interview marked ci indicates one of the interviews conducted with children. The details of these are set out in Chapter 8.

'too much television' and/or the 'wrong sort of television', reflects one of the biggest potential conflicts between images of childhood idylls generally, and lived childhoods themselves. It is part of much lay, popular, professional and academic discourse about childhood/media, but particularly television, relationships . If anything does not fit in with notions of country childhood idylls, it is children at home, on a sunny afternoon watching television.

I have already stated in Chapter 2 that many children's books and products take the countryside and agriculture as their setting and/or content. This is particularly so for the products aimed at younger children. Although I have not explored whether parents and other gift buyers/givers deliberately select such for children in Allswell, it seems that their toys and books, like those of many other children, have a high rural/agriculture/nature content. Such products emphasise these places and processes as things positively associated with childhood, and given that they are produced to appeal and sell to children through adults, they present a bucolic account of such spaces where animals are happy and technologies are clean and friendly. Fig 7.12 shows our neighbours' child, Christopher playing with one of his agricultural toys, a model farm, and Fig 7.13 shows another farm yard product,

Fig 7.12 Christopher playing with his toy farm.

Fig 7.13 'That's me', is what Christopher says of this figure of a boy which can be placed in a farm yard model.

which places a figure of a boy in a farmyard scene. Linda, Christopher's mother, told me that he says 'that's me' of the figure when he plays with this product. Children do make connections between the products they encounter and the everyday world they encounter, Polly told me -

> I picked some (books) up from Sainsburys about Bramble the cow and every time we go past a field with some cows in - "there's Bramble" ...(And) they (the children) thought it was wonderful when the postman actually came up into the driveway with his van.. "It's Postman Pat". Our postman he come to and knocks...you know he come to every door, on foot...(*oh I see this is more like)* well it's just like Postman Pat. *(did they say that?)* Yes, they did, they said "look he's come, come in with his van into the driveway"...They did enjoy that (19. 2).

Such products, coupled with encouragement from adults, represent conduits through which popular discourses of the rural as a childhood idyll, can reach children and through which their attitudes, desires and behaviour are structured into an acceptance and performance of the idyll.

Stories for older children perform a similar function. Taking Enid Blyton's Famous Five as a key example, new productions of these stories have been shown on prime time children's television, and new editions of the books are on sale and are

common possessions amongst older children in the village. In my interview with Jane she told me about reading one of these books to a child she was baby-sitting the night before

> Last night I was reading a book to Jim, ... the Famous Five book, one that I've read, and on the front, what are the children wearing, track-suits from the 1990's...*(And they are wandering around the countryside quite a lot aren't they?)* Yes. The Famous Five, definitely, and they are always sleeping on heather and bracken, and, and I *do* like that, I suppose because it's using your initiative, isn't it. That's probably what it is, rather than (running the) gauntlet, it's using your initiative and having to think things out, hide - *(and its slightly adventurous)*. Yes (7.3).

Jane made the interesting point that on the cover of this new edition the children are dressed in contemporary clothing. This clearly is to help sell the product by trying to link the reader more directly with these stories and landscapes, which are quintessential mid twentieth century accounts of country childhoods, but it also must blur the distinction between this imaginary landscape of the story and the real landscape which adjoins Jim's garden. Jane's obvious enthusiasm and approval for the story then puts a further layer of positive association between these two worlds.

7.2.2 Fear

But this desire in most parents to encourage their children to live out notions of idyll, or at least to get outdoors, is not unfettered for it comes into conflict with a number of other constructions of (country childhood). Perhaps most significantly it comes into direct conflict with the fears parents have about the safety of their child/children once they are out of immediate range of visual and/or aural contact. Such fears revolve around the possibility of dangers which can be prevented if a parent is closely monitoring a child, and also the potentially worse consequences of the dangers if they are realised when and where a child would be difficult if not impossible to find. Any degree of separation of child and guardian is seen to hold a degree of risk, and the overwhelming impression is that the risks are perceived as becoming increasingly high in correspondence with the increasing degree of separation. As recounted in Chapter 4, one of the series of child murder stories which made national headlines in 1995 was that of a young girl who was abducted while sleeping in a tent with friends from the garden of the house where she was staying. Apart from such extreme and shocking cases, there is always the depressingly frequent flow of accounts of the accidental deaths of children in indoor/outdoor domestic settings when briefly left unattended. The critical, and with hindsight, alterable element in these stories is that the children were not being

directly monitored by a guardian at the time of the incident. (As a result some parents do try to adopt a regime of constant surveillance).

The risks are seen to become increasingly high in proportion to the increasing degree of separation of children from their guardians. This separation can be both in spatial/temporal terms, (how far away, and how long away the children are); and also in informational terms (to what extent the parents/guardians know where the children are if they are separated). As notions of country childhood idylls and indeed childhood idylls more generally, often involve quite high degrees of spatial/temporal and informational freedom, these are exactly the patterns of childhood most likely to cause parents most anxiety, and most likely to be curbed because of these anxieties. When I asked the Ted and Margaret -

> *(Do you mind them going in the field?) (Site 2, next to their garden).* (Both parents replied together), no/oh no, (Then Margaret continued) but I have to say I worry a bit if they are going to go further, if I don't know, because you never know whose about. *(sure).* That's all it is. But I still don't think I worry as much as if it was in a town, (***Ted, No, obviously you would be worrying a lot more if you lived in central Bristol or something*** (21.1).

In many popular accounts of country childhoods, and in many of the memories parents in Allswell gave of their childhoods, these forms of separations are depicted as being common place and substantial. Children could roam extensively, for long periods of time, and without parental knowledge in terms of where. But they are now under pressure, and I would suggest that informational separation for many children has been lost. Parents will let children 'go off' but only if they know where to, and a return time has been set or negotiated. *This inevitably changes the nature of the children's experiences when they are out. The spontaneity of exploration, of changing minds, of following up new ideas, is lost if the pre-arranged spatial and temporal terms are stuck too.* In Allswell the purity of the space, (this is considered in detail further on), and the notions of idyll means that degrees of spatial separation still do occur, but the range of this has lessened and the age thresholds at which children can venture away from the home space has generally gone up.

Again there was evidence in the interviews that some parents were aware of this curbing of the practice of idyll by the restriction caused by fear, and that this came into conflict with the imaginary idyll. When I said to Margaret

> *(there is) an intuitive thing that there is more freedom in the countryside for kids to just go out and about and roam).(She replied)* I don't believe in that now. I *did* believe in that. *(When did you believe in it?)* Well I think I probably believed in that until - (long pause), *(until your kids got to that age?), yea,* Probably till the kids got that age, when they could, and I realised that in fact it wasn't safe...I started talking to a group of women... we started talking about children being attacked, our kids were just beginning to leave the nest, probably 5 or 6, and we were giving them a bit

> more freedom...and we started talking about kids being attacked by other people, you know, out and about, and it turned out the only woman in this group, and there were about eight of us talking, who had ever been attacked, lived in a village location, (she named a nearby village), and she said to me "well I was attacked" she said "and it was somebody just passing through". And that then began to make me think, that people actually only come into this village, either to see people in the village, or to use it as a short cut through. And that started me thinking well...it's the car in the last decade, which has really made it, where people might come out to prey, more on kids in this location than they might do in city. I don't know (21. 1).

As indicated in this quote the role of the car in changing parents attitude to the perceived safety of their children is critical in all this, and as a key change to the village it is dealt with in section 7.3.

There is a further compounding of this issue, in that it could be expected that parents would get to trust, and therefore to stretch, their children's freedom, through the experience of no (serious) problems arising (if it is so), when their children (and others) have been to the extremes of their set ranges of spatial/temporal freedom. But this is challenged by the ever expanding needs and desires of the children themselves. Parental/guardian fear is constantly being reinvented and tested by the next stage of their children's development of physical mobility and degree of independence. Gwen who was quoted above as seeing her child as a 'free spirit' and also encouraging him to be so, expressed the anxiety of such a moment when she first let her seven and a half year old son walk home alone across the fields, doing the same route in fact as Richard did above.

> *(Would you let him walk up to Jane's on his own yet?)* Um, I think I would now, I think he's got enough traffic sense. Seven and a half, yes, here in the village, because it's so familiar I think. This all started with us coming down from Blackmead, and then he said "stop the car mum, I'm going to go over the fields", and I thought, uh oh (expression of apprehension) you know, this is it, you know, come over the, *(from the gate?)* from the gate, yea, and you know instantly - fortunately it happened on the spur of the moment rather than being a planned thing. So I though well you know, he's got to do it sometime, and I really said OK, OK - and my fear wasn't people, and isn't people round here, it would probably be a dog, do you know what I mean, if it wasn't a dog - *(yes, something uncertain),* yes but I feel you can't protect them from everything, (*no*), can you, so, so he's done that, and he's come to the - I was waiting for him at the village hall, thinking will he be all right and trying not to sort of, get too hot if he took longer than I thought he would have done. But he's fine and he's done that several times since. *(That was purely his idea?)* Oh yea. *(But has he walked that way with you, so he knows the way?)* He knows the way (10.1).

Fear acting as a restriction on children's freedom within the village was evident in all the interviews. To a large degree, it was *the* major cause of why parents felt that they had less restricted childhoods than those of their children. But at the same time it also varied considerably from parent to parent and family to family, as also in the specific nature and degree of fear and the consequences of such. Some parents who were quite fearful for their children gave them more freedom than others with similar levels of fear because they were more determined, or felt it more important,

to let their children have certain level of freedom and opportunity to practice the idyll.

One key area of contradiction about fear in the countryside was that some saw it as *safe* because it is largely unpeopled while others saw it as *unsafe* for the same reason. Jane told me,

> It's just your fear of wild, open spaces, where if anyone is hiding, no one else would see. You know in a city you feel there's lots of people so that deters - baddies. *(So have you felt that a bit around here?)* Only because of stories, no, no I've never felt unsafe in Allswell, *(no, but -?)* but, because it has happened in other villages in Britain, which has shocked everybody, *(your always worried about that one in a million chance).* Yes and how would you *(quite, yea)* console yourself (7.4).

Whereas Polly, (the 'townie') said,

> .... I think I'd let Simon go that much further here than I would at home...I think its safer here, well I just don't think - you just see so few people around. So you think oh there's not very many people around so yes it would be all right to let them go across the field (19.2).

Such differences are also evident in the quotes from Margaret and Gwen above, where they see the absence of people as either meaning an absence of threat, or an absence of surveillance and help against threat. The single person becomes a danger, a crowd a refuge. Margaret, when recalling her own childhood in a semi-urban area, told how her mother had told her to run to the nearest house if there was ever a sign of trouble, but that, in the countryside away from the village, was not an option.

Others fears centred on the dangers the environment held in terms of accidents, for example, Victor was afraid that his child might be in danger from modern agricultural technology, and also from the risk of being shot when the shooting was taking place on Manor Farm.

> I'm saying it's just my perception, I'm just saying that compared to where I like (grew up)...there wasn't much you know, machinery and things, there wasn't shoots, you know Christopher could go up on a Saturday and get shot by rustling through - well I know it far-, it's a low risk (3.24).

Such fears, of various violent crimes and of various dangers through accident, act as a major break on adults/parents desire for children to live out the country childhood idyll, and creates a considerable degree of tension and anxiety within parents/guardians through the on-going processes of decision-making, and worrying about the consequences of such decisions as they are enacted. Along with other forces, particularly control and order, which are considered later, fear is a key factor in the structuring of children's lives in Allswell, and this is congruent with the more

generalised debated considered earlier about the impact of fear on childhood within society more generally. But 'between' these two major forces of idyll and fear acting on children's worlds there are a number of other mechanisms which need to be considered.

7.2.3 Familiarity: Local Knowledge of Community and Landscape

The degree to which a community, in this case Allswell, is collectively and individually familiar with itself and the surrounding landscape, has a considerable effect on the ways children interact with their environments and particularly the degree of spatial/temporal freedom allowed them.

I have already pointed out that many key popular tellings of country childhood stories are dated from the first half of this century and also from the end of the last. In rural areas of those times, as in Allswell, communities were often much more closely knit and more closely tied to the landscape. It is a common refrain in reminiscing about Allswell, and rural communities more generally, that in the past 'everybody knew everybody else'. This does appear to be the case in Allswell, and has only begun to breakdown over the last three decades or so. As well as this high level of social familiarity within the community, there was also a high level of familiarity within the community of the surrounding landscape. Patterns in everyday life took adults as agricultural owner/labourers, and children, into the surrounding fields as a matter of daily routine. In Allswell, children walked to the village school, often along lanes but also through the fields and paths, and at one time the older children of the school had to walk through the fields to the neighbouring, larger village school for certain lessons. Also a traditional task for children of the village was taking tea out to their parents who were labouring in the fields, and the children themselves often were expected to help with agricultural work. According to Hughes (1979) the teacher's log from Allswell school in the 1870s tells how the attendance was often poor because 'children were often away at work on the farms, hay making, picking up potatoes and sticks' (p. III). The extensive degree of rural children working in the fields and missing school to do so is considered by Kitteringham (1975), who draws material from a number of school logs, and also other sources such as reports drawn up on the use of child labour in agriculture. (ibid, p. 89).

Such activities, though perhaps not so much at the expense of school time, are still clearly remembered by the life long/long term residents of Allswell, and with them came a high degree of knowledge of and access to the surrounding farmland. When I asked Tom,

> *(was there any idea of trespass and not going to places?).* (He replied), no, none whatever. *(Everyone went everywhere?)* Everyone went just where they wanted. And if a farmer, you know, he would say, right come and help us take so many roots and you can go into the orchard and help yourselves to as many apples as you want, which we thought was good wages, because your parents couldn't afford to buy apples (17.7).

The families of Allswell, being predominately dependent on agricultural labour for a living, would have been very familiar both with the landscape itself and with those who owned and worked the landscape.

This intimacy between community and landscape has decayed considerably with the gradual shift away from agriculture as the main employment focus of the village. Now in Allswell, many people, both parents and children, have much less familiarity with the surrounding landscape, and also who owns it, who works it and what such work entails. When I was walking up to the sledding field after a fall of snow, I fell in with two parents and their ten year old daughter who were out walking. I suggested the girl accompanied me to the sledding field where I knew some of her friends already were. After a bit of hesitation, on her part, but encouragement from her parents, we went off together. (Later she was so taken with the sledding that she 'dragged' her dad up to the field for the afternoon session). As we walked along and talked, it suddenly occurred to me to ask if she knew who owned the land. The reply was 'no'. (fn # 48). When I asked Gwen if she or her children knew the farmer whose fields bordered the top of their garden.

> *(Do you know the farmer?),* I don't know, I waved to him, why? *(I just wondered to what percent do they know the farmer and do they, you know-),* oh they don't, know they don't unfortunately, that's - they don't but I think 'cause, - it is quite anonymous isn't it, because I remember when I was growing up, you'd know whose farm; you know, there's Castle Farm, and you'd know whose fields belonged to who, and you'd know which field to go in, or, and somebody would shout at you, you know I've been shouted at for being in the wrong field. Um, but they don't know, they know these belong *to a farmer,* and it's someone up at Churchdown, but they wouldn't know him from Adam...*(have they ever encounter them in a field or anything?),* I don't think him so much, but they have the helpers, they always wave, they're very friendly (10.2).

Although the farmers of Monkshill and Manor farm are quite widely known in the village, there has been a gradual distancing between the otherwise scattered and diminishing agricultural community and the village itself. This decline in familiarity with the landscape and those owning/working it causes a number of uncertainties

which potentially dampens peoples' readiness to venture into to the landscape and also to allow their children to do the same. The lack of familiarity with agricultural processes engenders both fear in terms of safety and also fear of damaging crops and disturbing animals. Alongside this, the uncertainty as to who the landowner is, (even if most people know some of the landowners/tenant to an extent, the knowledge of where ownership boundaries lie is indistinct), and the landowner's likely reaction to people on the land, also means people will be reluctant to venture much beyond the footpath trails. Beyond these uncertainties, the lack of knowledge of the landscape itself changes it from being a landscape of known places where children might go/be allowed to go, to an unknown landscape which may become an imaginary place of danger and unease. This decay of familiarity between the community and the landscape is exacerbated by the decay of familiarity within the community. This decay means that most parents and children in the village do not know at least some of the other people in the village, and these become strangers, who also become a source of uncertainty in relation to how they will interact with children within the landscape, and also, and perhaps this a more insidious fear, the community now cannot be sure whether unknown people who may be encountered in the landscape are locals or outsiders.

But having said the above, there are processes at work which are, to a limited extent, creating links of familiarity between the community and the landscape in new ways, and in fact within the community itself. These processes include some of the village events described in chapter 6. Another form is the recreational use of the countryside by families, which introduces children to places which they may later begin to explore unilaterally, and also familiarises (parts of) the landscape to the parents so they are more certain about their children's interaction with it.

VILLAGE EVENTS

Some village events do have a role in familiarising the local population with the landscape. For example, May Day, VE Day, (a one off event in 1995), the Duck Race, sledding, and the occasional game of rounders, use spaces which are not generally seen as public space, and which in the later four cases, are normally more or less purely agricultural spaces. Such occasions not only give the opportunity for parents and children to see what these spaces are like, but also begin to breakdown the public/private space division and introduces, at least the notion, that such

spaces can be used recreationally, and that the agricultural landscape is not *necessarily* a no-go area. In the case of the VE Day celebrations, and in fact the home cricket matches, children did/do take the opportunity to explore some of the sites already considered in Chapter 6. Fig 7.14 shows how children at the VE celebrations broke away from the 'main' events and instead played by and explored the stream that runs along the edge of the road and the field. (Site 2 in Ch. 6).

Fig 7.14 Children playing and exploring in field (site 2), during 1995 VE day celebrations.

The cricket matches also serves this purpose but in a slightly different way in that the children who gather as part of family groups often get together and disappear through a gap in the fence and go exploring along the bank and hedge, (Site 8 in Ch. 6), and also in the bushes beside the cricket field (site 9 in Ch. 6).

COUNTRYSIDE RECREATION

A number of families, or sub-sets of them, go for walks where children accompany parents/guardians into the surrounding countryside. These walks, which are often conducted on weekends, bank holidays and/or other holidays and vary considerably from modest circuits to much more ambitious expeditions, again serve to familiarise

the landscape to the adults and the children. In a number of interviews I was told that children now go alone where they had initially been with their parents, who in turn, are more likely to let the children go because, firstly they have in effected already checked a place out, and secondly would know where to start looking if the children did not reappear.

Bolstering this recreational familiarisation of the landscape, one of the most prominent activities of the parish council, through the work of the footpath 'officer', has been the charting, publicising, and campaigning for the good management of the network of footpaths around Allswell, mainly through liaising with both local landowners and the local authorities. Within the recreational users of the landscape and the footpath system, there are a few enthusiasts who feel it is part of their, and their children's lifestyle, to engage with the landscape in a more concerted way. The motivation for this is a complex mix of aesthetics, health, environmental ethics, and the desire to be in touch with the local landscape - its history, flora and fauna, (and pubs) - and not least to extend these to their children. Jack and Ruby's mother Amanda, along with another mother Chris and her children, have on some occasions abandoned the established car ride to school, and instead walked the children through the fields to Wellsdon School. Amanda and her partner John also invited most of the village on a walk to Wellsdon Common (Site 19 in Ch. 6) and back on New Year's Day, with a party at their house afterwards. This event was deemed a great success, with seemingly hordes of children rushing ahead, or lagging behind the slowly rotating groups of adults.

Inevitably, the degrees of familiarity adults and children have of differing parts of the surrounding landscape will vary considerably. In some cases there will be those who for some reason or other have quite a high level of familiarity with some part of the landscape and the power/discipline dynamics of the attitudes towards its use for recreation, play and exploration. Those in such positions can in effect become gatekeepers to others in the village in that they provide a means of overcoming non-familiarity.

7.2.4 Gatekeepers

To overcome concerns over trespass, authority, or even uncertainty and fear which may stop children using spaces in the countryside, gatekeepers who can build links

between the children of the village the landscape and the farmers/landowners are critical. In my first interview, which was with the Leisure Manager of the local council responsible for the provision of play facilities in rural areas it was pointed out that the local farmer doesn't necessarily know, perhaps, trust, everyone that lives in the village and therefore is not prepared to really welcome the people onto his land (1. 7/8). This makes the point that the weakening of familiarity goes both ways, in that not only do many of the village not know the farmers very well, if at all, but also the farmers do not know who many of the villagers are, and consequently if a person on his/her land is even a local or not.

But in Allswell gatekeepers can short circuit this process to some extent. At our end of the village, Jack and Ruby have unrestricted access to the yard and tree house/den site (site 5, Ch. 6) on Manor Farm and almost unrestricted access to the barns themselves[2] (site 4, Ch. 6). This has come about because they and their parents are closely involved with my family and through us, my extended family who are the owners of Manor Farm. The use of this space is such that part of the fence that divides of their garden from the yard has been virtually abandoned (fig 7. 15), (this in a property which is otherwise highly maintained and ordered). Through Jack and Ruby, various other children now have quite free access to these spaces. The Nutbrown children often visit and play, especially in the summer, and various other village friends and school friends also come on differently regular bases. About three years ago it was the farmer's, Joseph's, two children who were the gatekeepers, and for one summer, various combinations of village children had a phase of gathering and playing in the dutch barn which had a partially used stack of bales in it. These older children, who have now seemingly 'grown out of' or lost interest in such activities, introduced Jack and Ruby to the yard, in terms of it being a usable play space, and now in turn, the latter are introducing Sam (my son) and other younger children to these spaces, in that the younger children would not be allowed to go around there if they were not in the company of the older ones. So these 'gatekeepers' not only introduce their equivalently aged friends to these spaces but also younger children, who may in turn become the main users.

---

[2] This access sometimes is disputed or questioned mostly on safety grounds, and this in turn, depends on the state or content of the barns at any give time, high stacks of bales are deemed dangerous, (but are also attractive to the children) and denials of access are usually followed by a gradual relaxation as the children either forget or re-gather their nerve.

Fig 7.15 Abandoned section of fence providing access from Jack and Ruby's garden to Manor Farm yard.

At the other end of the village, the children of the family who have bought the farm house of Valley Farm, and thirty acres of land beside it, have become gatekeepers to those spaces, in that their friends from school and from the village tend to gather and play there. Consequently it has become something of a focal point for some children in the village with the woods, stream and 'the den' (site 12 Ch. 6). being the main attractions, and where playing 'armies in the woods' and making 'rafts' and going on 'quests' are some of the preferred activities (ci 6.1).

It is important to keep in mind that such gatekeeping processes vary in spatial and temporal terms, due to amongst other things, generational, ownership and familiarity dynamics, and are thus uneven, contingent and fluid. For example on Monkshill Farm, which is the only fully functional farm located near the village, the children of the household are now adults and the eldest son, Charlie, works on the farm with his father. Having attended a barn dance there and watched the children running and exploring around the inevitable rough patch of ground adjoining the yard which is landscaped with stacks of timber, tyres, and bits of machinery, and overgrown corners, I realised that this could be a place for children to play. It was when Charlie was young and he was a gatekeeper to these spaces, and it may well be again if he

has children, but in between times, it is not a place which, as far as I know, the village children go to any great extent. Consequently the experiences of childhood in Allswell can vary substantially over time through the contingent circumstances of which potential childhood spaces have gatekeepers who can in effect open them up to other children.

7.2.5 Landownership

Landownership is also important in these circumstances as it is a key factor in the much wider issues concerning access to the countryside more generally. I have already considered how familiarity between landowners and the community has a role in influencing the degree to which children (and adults) use the sorts of spaces depicted in Chapter 6, but behind this lies the attitudes and practices of the landowner to access to his/her land. Here changes in landownership are both key and revealing. In the case of the farms in Allswell the degree of familiarity between the farmer and the community often meant the farmer had little objection to village people coming onto the land. For example Iris told me that Fred and Olive Tanner, when they owned Valley Farm, had

> always said we could go anywhere on the farm, so we (with her son James) spent a lot of time (there)...we knew the farm very thoroughly (5.9).

But changes in landownership can break such established patterns of familiarity and introduce new owners who do not welcome people onto their land, or whose attitudes are unknown and therefore assumed not to be as welcoming. On the split up of Valley Farm, part of the land was sold in a separate lot to someone who lives some miles away from the village. The new access gate put in by the new owner to serve this unit of land, with its barbed wire and warning signs, leaves very little doubt about the attitude to 'trespass' on the land (fig 7.16).

I asked Margaret and Ted whose children play in the field around their house (Site *no 2 Ch. 6) - which also used to be part of Valley Farm, but which was brought by their neighbour Iris, (who then resold a small portion of the field onto Margaret and Ted so that they could extend their garden)-*

> *(before this field changed ownership, were you just as happy for the children to use it , were you worried about notional ideas of trespass or worried about if there had been - ?)* (both replied) *no/no not at all. (Had you ever discussed it with the owner?)* No... *(What about Valley Farm? I suppose, before that changed hands. I suppose kids were a bit young to venture that far were they?). (Margaret) - Well, no, I used to take them kite flying, up in that field behind Valley Farm, and we did not even bat an eyelid about that. We used to walk very regularly, down through by the sewage works, I know there's a footpath there, then up through the copse, and over the other side. And we often used to see Mrs Tanner, and I mean, she was fine, she never*

Fig 7.16 New 'no trespassing' sign and barbed wire on gate to field recently bought by new owner on the sale of Valley Farm.

> used to say anything, and I have to say because Hugh and Lizzy (a retired couple, Hugh used to be footpath officer on the parish council) used to walk there, and they'd walked for, what thirty odd years?, we followed their example. (**Ted - *never really worried about it because it's pasture land).*** (Margaret) - but I think now, I have to say to you I think they are more precious now, I wouldn't do it now. *(because?)*....change of ownership, and I know that Mr Adams has actually, well particularly his daughter has actually told people off for walking on the land (21.2).

In the case of the thirty acres bought along with Valley Farm house, and the field, (site 2), which was also bought as part of the break up of Valley farm, both could be said to have been bought in order to preserve these spaces for access, mostly for the new owners, but also for others besides. In the latter case, Iris bought the field in order to preserve its status in terms of access and use. She and her family had been happy with it as it was managed under the established ownership of the Tanner's, but the prospect of it being bought by new owner, and the spectre of development, (given the field's position on the road), had been alarming enough to mean that only ownership could guarantee the field's continuing status. In the case of Valley Farm house and land itself, this was very much purchased with the whole family in mind, ensuring that the children did have space, and that there was enough space to keep horses and practice what can best be termed recreational agriculture, with the keeping of a few goats and sheep. This contains the spaces and access to the stream and woods which have become something of a focus

point for some children in the village. Such instances can be seen as examples of the media reports of people buying land near their houses in rural settings to preserve its status and to ensure access for their children.

7.2.6 Private Property

As well as issues of landownership, attitudes towards ownership, or private property, play a strong role in determining people's attitudes towards venturing onto farmland beyond the network of public paths and also letting children, particularly their own children do the same. Above I was addressing the attitudes and practices of landowners themselves, where they were indicated to others. Here I am considering the variation in values and assumptions people hold about venturing on to someone else's property when the owners identity and attitude is not clear. Given the relative remoteness between most of the village and the landowning farmers, the break down in familiarity, it is often these constructions which are key in decisions about letting children out into the privately owned landscapes.

This can be illustrated by the comments of four mothers whose gardens have a similar relationship the fields to which they adjoin in that they all back on to the fields along the north side of the village where there is no footpath or 'official' access into the fields.

Gwen who encourages her children to go up into these fields, and whose garden fence has been deliberately built to allow access (this is considered again later), told me that her children saw the field next to their garden as 'their' field, and she clearly had decided that it was all right for the children to go onto this land, although she was keen to emphasise that the children were aware it was private property and that they must not damage crops.

> *(You said just now they think this is their field. Their territory does expand beyond the garden?).* Oh yea they think the field - they wouldn't say to next door, oh that's our field, *(no, no),* but they think of it as *their field*, you know. *(So do they go in it?)* Oh yes, and they play. The corn has come, and they come and it's gone all scratchy, its so dry, so they haven't been able to go in it for several weeks. *(They've cut it now.)* They've cut it now, so they'll probably go and look at the bales and things. *(Is there a gate?)....(Some people obviously would be a bit concerned about their kids getting into trouble and things, and you know, just the idea of trespass, but-)* well I must admit its a fine line, isn't it you know, because I always say to them, this field belongs to somebody else, and they're are told about the crops, that they mustn't go in the crops, because, you know, having some sensitivity to it, *(Yea, sure)* (10. 2).

But further down the village, the recognition that the same fields were private property lead Wendy Hall's (10) mum Irene to say

> One thing I'd worry about here that, if she did get out of the garden, you see it's all private land, and because I know who they belong to - you don't feel so bad about walking... through farmland, but, because we are neighbours.. I have also seen them walk around that bit (12. 5).

Similarly Diana, mother of two boys Jack (9) and Jim (5), and whose garden also backs on to these fields said that part of the reason they were not allowed there was that it was 'farmland' (14.6).

Sue's attitude was closer to Gwen's, she knew that one of her sons used these fields as a short cut to the Greyson's, but she was a bit uneasy abut the element of trespass, and as mentioned by Ted in a quote earlier, and Gwen above, a critical factor which often swings parental attitudes one way or the other is whether the fields are put down to a crop or just to pasture.

> Joe goes of sometimes with his friends to the woods down by the Greyson's across the fields and down - but there's much more awareness of the, quite often we've got grain growing in these fields, and so it's different now. When they are just grass fields then they'll go out and play out there (24.1).

These quotes reveal some of the uncertainty around 'trespass' and going on farmland where there is no footpath or right of way. If access was restricted to the official rights of way and public spaces only - and of the latter there is very little save the roads, church yard and cricket pitch - many elements of the country childhood idyll would be inevitably lost, and lived childhoods would be very constrained. Fortunately in Allswell, though the existence of various spaces detailed in Chapter 6 and at least some potential for accessing them, due to the factors outlined above, the spaces available for childhood do go beyond these. But this is distinctly uneven between children because a whole range of reasons, such as attitudes to private property set out above, the preferences and attitudes of the children themselves, the age patterns of their sibling and friend groupings. But also important in this regard, even within a settlement as small as Allswell, are the existence of quite distinct micro-geographies where opportunities and restrictions vary due to social/cultural/spatial differences.

7.2.7 Micro-Geographies

These micro-geographies are critical in the imposition of structures which impinge on children's lives. Not only do they mean that the village cannot be seen as a single space in terms of the issues discussed, but that such variation will also be profound and complex across rural spaces more generally. In Allswell the location of a child's/children's house, will be critical in determining the nature of their interaction

with the extra-domestic environment. This is particularly so in terms of the positional relationships with the roads; footpaths; open spaces and quasi open spaces; other dwellings; other dwellings with children; differing agricultural spaces and so on. This is of course complexly cross-cut with parental attitudes to fear, control, private property, and also the attitudes of the children themselves. Gwen told me how she thought the location of her house which is roughly in the middle of the village, and fronting onto the road, had had a significant impact on her children's interaction with other children in the village and their access to the spaces they use

> You don't see the children walking up and down the village, the Quick's play with Walter a lot and the Greyson's - there's a pocket there, and there's a pocket up with you with Christopher, Sam and Ruby, and we are sort of in no man's land in the middle (10.5).

Many other examples could be given and in fact each child will be situated in a unique matrix of material and cultural/social micro-geographies which will effect how their life is structured, but the key point is that these are operating within the broader contexts of constructions of the rural, and Allswell, as seen as an idyll, will shape that matrix in certain ways. Perhaps it could be said that the notion of idyll will find some means of articulation given the possibilities presented by the micro-geographies, and it is interesting the Gwen's children, who are 'cut off' by the road (at their present age) from going to the 'pockets' of group activity at each end of the village, instead go out, and are sanctioned to do so, into the fields which back onto their garden.

7.3 CHANGING SPACES AND PATTERNS OF ALLSWELL AS A CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENT

This section now tries to bring some historical perspective to the changing nature of childhood in Allswell and also to consider some of the structuring forces within the place itself which have changed. These are closely related to, and overlap with the structuring forces given above, but differ or are treated differently in the following ways. Those above are mostly contemporary constructions of Allswell as a place to bring up children, these have a heritage of change, notably the growth of fear as a restriction on children's freedom which has changed the village as a childhood space, but this has been in response to mostly external forces which affect the village. The issues below are about long term internal structural changes to the village itself, and to its micro-geographies, and they are considered because they are seen as key changes to the village in terms of the changing nature of childhood

experiences within Allswell. They may also shed some light on whether country childhood idylls of popular imagination were some kind of 'reality' or whether they are more a complex construction of adult memory and nostalgia.

7.3.1 Two Allswell childhoods Remembered

In two of the interviews I conducted, quite powerful and evocative descriptions of past childhoods in Allswell emerged, and the vividness and value put on them emphasised the importance they held for the tellers of these tales. I was immediately struck how these recounted memories fitted in very easily with the popular tellings of other childhood idylls considered in Chapter 2, particularly in those of Chris Smith whose detailed stories of his childhood can be seen as a cross between the pastoral/village lyricism of Laurie Lee's *Cider with Rosie,* or Herbert Read's *The Innocent Eye,* and the crazes, projects, adventures and encounters which make up Richmeal Crompton's *William* stories.

EXTRACTS FROM CHRIS SMITH'S ALLSWELL CHILDHOOD STORIES

We were always into trolleys, we were building trolleys, *(Trolley's for trundling up and down the road?)* Hmm (i.e., yes) , Hmm. We had - a pal of mine had almost a thriving business really, because we used to build them for other people, we built a double decker one once, which tipped over and broke his arm, on the corner by the garage, a car was coming up the other way, and we swerved off and the whole thing...

We used to spend hours out in the road outside our place in the evening, playing hopscotch. *(What right in the middle of the road?).* Oh yea, we'd spend all night there and hardly see anything, the odd car would come up and we'd have to move.

The garden was an absolute wilderness..., the kids - all we'd do is what we'd want to do, and we were basically digging tunnels, we used to dig down...it was an absolute rabbit warren. *(Could you get right in them?)* Oh yeah, we used to go down inside you know, right in underneath. It would fall in, it was horrendous. We did a cut and cover method, you know with corrugated iron and wood and so on, but a lot of it was just burrowing, burrowing like rabbits, *(into the bank?)* oh, all over, all over the garden. *(So it was quite a large scale enterprise?)* Oh yeah, and then we'd have this telephone system, with the cans and the cotton, it was good fun. *(Do you reckon quite a lot of the kids would come and join in?)* Oh yeah, yeah, oh yeah, we were, a couple of us were sort of, they all followed us around and they did what we wanted them to do. We set up all sorts of funny things. I set up a church at one time. I had a sort of leaning at one time, mother got quite worried, and thought I was having a leaning, and spoke to the rector here, and we actually built a church and I was having services there....I eventually set a cinema in the attic, for kids, *(a real one?),* oh yeah proper movie pictures, this was silent then. (Chris's grandfather had been one of the earliest travelling film projectionists and all the equipment was still available for use).

Of course we'd help with hay making. *(Were you paid for that or did you do it for the fun of it?)* Do it for the fun of it, just do it for the fun of it, and you'd get an illicit glass of cider or something....We used to (inaudible) on Crest Farm and they had some wonderful old equipment up there, the old original Fordson tractor... still going strong it was, the elevator and stationary engine, Lister D running the elevators. I'd go down the mill, the old mill as it was in those days, rat infested, hurricane lamp job, with old Joseph Pugh, and he'd go down and start the old mill up...and the Mill House had its own private electric piston, had accumulators bubbling away, and

engine popping off all the time, that used to fascinate me. It always seemed wet and windy, It wasn't though, we were talking about it the other night, ...about all the glow worms which were in the hedge coming up Mill Lane.

We'd go to Fred Tanner's sometimes, Fred, he kept his old horse, his last horse, till it dropped more or less, he was very fond of horses... and we used to ride around on this thing in the fields. The mill used to fascinate me because they still had quite a lot of horses still there. The old Fordson Major and all this business, and I can remember going down the rick yard down there and seeing the horse going round and round and round driving the elevator.

That's a place we used to play in, quite a lot, the old forge...There was a long period when the old rectory was empty. We used to get in there. ... We were always building dams and climbing under the tunnels under the (road), tadpoles, conkers, sledding. *(Did you play in the fields?)* Yeah, yeah oh yea, we used to troll around... *(what about the woods?),* yeah, the one above the track there, that was a favourite one, we used to - bluebells and things like that's....Yeah we spent a lot of time in the woods there. And we used to have expeditions all up in the woods behind here, Ash Break... (but) You were always a bit wary of the farmers, you always had that - "did we ought to be here?" *(Did you have any skirmishes with them, the farmers?)* Not that I really remember. We were probably told to buzz off sometimes, probably when we were messing around on the farmyard... We used to play up in the big barns that were here (Manor Farm). And then we'd get told off because we were jumping about on the bales.

Miss Stephens who was the old lady who lived in the cottage now demolished...there was a lovely old cottage. She was like a mother to all the kids in the village. She was a marvellous, ...lovely old lady she was. She had actually fallen on very hard times, she'd lost a packet in shares in the Zambezi railway or something...Her mother, she came from Finchley, her mother would go to Queen Mary's sewing parties at Buckingham Palace. She was actually a painter by profession, and um, she had exhibits in London. Actually I managed to save a *few of her* pictures, and pen and ink drawings she did, because she got in such a state that she stated breaking all the frames up to put on the fire to keep herself warm. 2 or 3 of us in the village actually sort of looked after her towards the end. She befriended all the kids so we'd go around there for cups of tea and bits of cake and so on. And she had *this* door, and on the edge of the door she would cut with a knife our heights as we grew. And then mark it on the other side who we all were.

She, (another old lady) was very very religious she was - a chapel - bible puncher you see, and that was one thing she got all the kids involved in. And of course we were still going to Sunday school, and she persuaded us...on a Wednesday night, to go round there, and of course we were entertained around there, very well, sweets and all sorts of things, *(ah, I see, yes),* and she had a wonderful harmonium, which she thumped the living daylights out of, and we used to have these services around there, you know, um, (inaudible) and all these old things that the had, and we used to *love* it...They were all getting very worried at the church, she used to go round, she was on the circuit, and she was really, all hell fire and brimstone.

The children used to go to the tap on the green with containers for water, (and) you still had to get the milk from the post office, go up with a can and it would be ladled out. You'd meet all your friends coming out with their cans...

I had quite an enjoyable childhood really (23. 1- 4 edited).

VIOLET HUGHES' ALLSWELL CHILDHOOD STORIES

Violet and her brother used to come an stay at her grandparents cottage, (now owned by her parents), for extended periods when she was a child, and to where she now brings her children to stay. She remembered coming to Allswell 'from about ten onwards' and that 'coming to the cottage was part of my whole childhood', and particularly strong are her memories of becoming involved with the milking at Manor Farm. This came about initially because the cow man (Walter) lived opposite their

cottage, and the cows passed to and from milking each day along the lane outside the house.

> We used to lie in bed and soon as we thought it was remotely the right time, we'd watch for Walter, watch for his going up the lane, and soon as we saw him going up the lane we'd hare down stairs and walk up the lane with him and go an collect the cows with him, and then walk back down to the milking shed... As I recall that was the major thing we did when we were here, so I imagine we did do it everyday...I remember vividly them coming down the lane, and we'd be in the milking shed with him and my job was - he would have a board, he had a ... big hardboard board, and a pencil chart with all the names of the cows, and I can remember that he would call out the yield, and it would be my job to write down the yield, next to the name of the cow... and then he would send us home with milk too ... After milking we would stay and help sluice down the yard, and do those jobs, and I think it was quite late before we went back to (the) cottage.
>
> We must have come in the winter, but I think we mainly came in the summer, I was thinking about this, because the other thing that I vividly remember is blackberrying, which we always did with my grandmother. She again used to take us up that lane, and she had a spot which she claimed the other people in the village did not know about, and she was very cautious about it, she was very shy about telling anybody about it.
>
> We used to, went off up the lane and pottered in the fields a lot, and played in the stream (Site 10 in Ch. 6) The other thing we used to do - One Tree Hill (Site 19 in Ch. 6) - was really fascinating, and I can remember as we were older making expeditions to try and get there, and the enormous disappointment when we finally did, but probably for years, that was a sort of target, 'cause we'd look at it out of the window. We also played in the church yard quite a bit.
>
> I don't remember granny really telling us there wasn't anywhere we couldn't go. Oh yes we loved it. But that's partly, that's part and parcel, that's the place and the freedom and also the fact that we, that I, had a good relationship with my grandparents. For me it was a really special thing, you know it was wonderful part of my childhood which was very happy (21.1-2 edited).

Chris's childhood memories would have been predominately set in the early 1950's and Violets' in the early 1960's. Thus they are both, especially the latter, set in the period when the village was transforming from a closed to an open community, yet both are childhood stories which are reminiscent of the closed communities, and both would have parallels with the memories of Tom already referred to, when children could apparently go almost anywhere, and there were few if any restrictions placed on them in terms of parental fear. Chris's childhood, and that of Violet when she was staying in Allswell, were predominantly acted out in within the village. Key in this respect for Chris was that he attended the village school. I have already said that all the children in Allswell now have lives which extend beyond the village in a number of ways. The implications of this are considerable. Firstly the very centredness of earlier village childhoods, in the sense of identity with, and familiarity with a place, may be a powerful but less obvious part of notions of country childhoods. Secondly, the closedness of the village was a key factor in its construction as a safe place for children to be out and about in. The gradual opening up of the village, the increase in population, and the decrease in inter-community and community/landscape familiarity, inevitable took its toll on these perceptions of safety, and consequently children's freedom. To compound this,

children in the Allswell of today have extensive networks and interests beyond the village, through school, friends, family, increased mobility and wealth. Thus their attention is drawn away from the village as a place of play, and their knowledge worlds are much more varied and wide than would have been the case for past village children. This can be seen as a spatial, and consequently qualitative, dilution of village childhoods which impact on how people see those of now comparatively with past village childhoods.

Both Violet and Chris finished these descriptions of their memories of Allswell childhoods by suggesting that children in Allswell today do not make the most of their country childhood opportunities.

> (Violet) You are getting children growing up here who actually have no interest at all in the benefits of a place like this (21.2).
>
> (Chris) To me they seem to live a very boring existence because they don't seem to want to get up to anything...there're always moaning - we have run youth clubs here in the past, (aimed at 7-8 year olds). and um we always used to say, "they don't seem able to think for themselves. They don't seem to try and entertain themselves, or think what could get up to, or think of some project too do", the kids used to say (whiny voice) "we got nothing to do, there's nothing to do". And you thought, yes, well, we managed (23.5).

Such views reflect a more general suspicion and concern amongst those with memories of past childhood in the village, that this 'is not what it used to be', and consequently no longer completely conforms with the iconic views of country (village) childhoods, but it does retain symbolic and material elements of such and remains an idyll in comparison to many places elsewhere.

7.3.2 Development

Initially this section was intended to give quite a close account of development within the village. The assumption being that in the process of development childhood spaces had been eradicated or tidied away. To some extent this is so. The building of the new houses in Allswell since the end of the Second World War has consumed childhood spaces. For example the overgrown section of garden which Chris Smith described above as being the site of tunnelling and den building is now the site of a new house and garden. Also the development of Hazelmere, the cul-de-sac of twelve bungalows, did take away an area of community land which was used for allotments. Other houses which have in-filled along the road front have taken away other spaces, mainly parts of larger gardens or agricultural land, and

the derelict house which Chris Smith refers is now back in use. But as the sites in Chapter 6 show there are still open spaces in the village which would have been similar to those lost to such development, so this cannot be seen as having reached a critical level from this point of view. What is more significant is development terms is the retreat of agriculture from the village; the overall increase in population; shifts in population profile which leads to a breaking down of community familiarity; and an increase in traffic volume and speed and these are dealt with separately below. But before that, other developments in terms of things lost to the village should are briefly mentioned here. Like most (smaller) villages Allswell has experienced a decline in services and facilities. I have already described the facilities which remain in the village, these, particularly the garage and pub, but also church and cricket pitch are mainly for adult use. The shop, forge, bus service (which was never frequent) were also for adult use, but did feature in children's lives, often in ways quite independent from adult uses, and it is these which have been lost, or in the case of the bus service almost lost, to the village.

7.3.3 Retreat of Agriculture from the Village

Before the Second World War, agriculture was the dominating structuring force of the village in social, economic and cultural terms. It has since then declined both in its importance to the village and also in its presence within the village itself. Fig 7.17 indicates old agricultural buildings which have been converted to domestic dwellings and agricultural buildings still in use within the village. From this it can be seen that two farms which were in the village, Valley Farm and Crest Farm no longer exist at all. The old farm houses are now occupied by non farming families; the large stone buildings have been converted to houses and/or garages; the remaining farm infrastructure has been dismantled; and the spaces of the old yards and immediate surroundings are now parking areas and/or gardens for the new houses. This process has also happened to a partial extent on the other two farms in the village. The old farm yard of Manor Farm, and it's four surrounding stone agricultural buildings have been turned into five dwellings with respective gardens and parking spaces. But here as described in site 4 Ch. 6 a dutch barn and large modern shed remain in use for a still present, but much reduced, agricultural activity. Monkshill Farmhouse is still occupied by the farmer, but the main old stone barn of this yard has also been converted for a (very grand) domestic dwelling, and the main

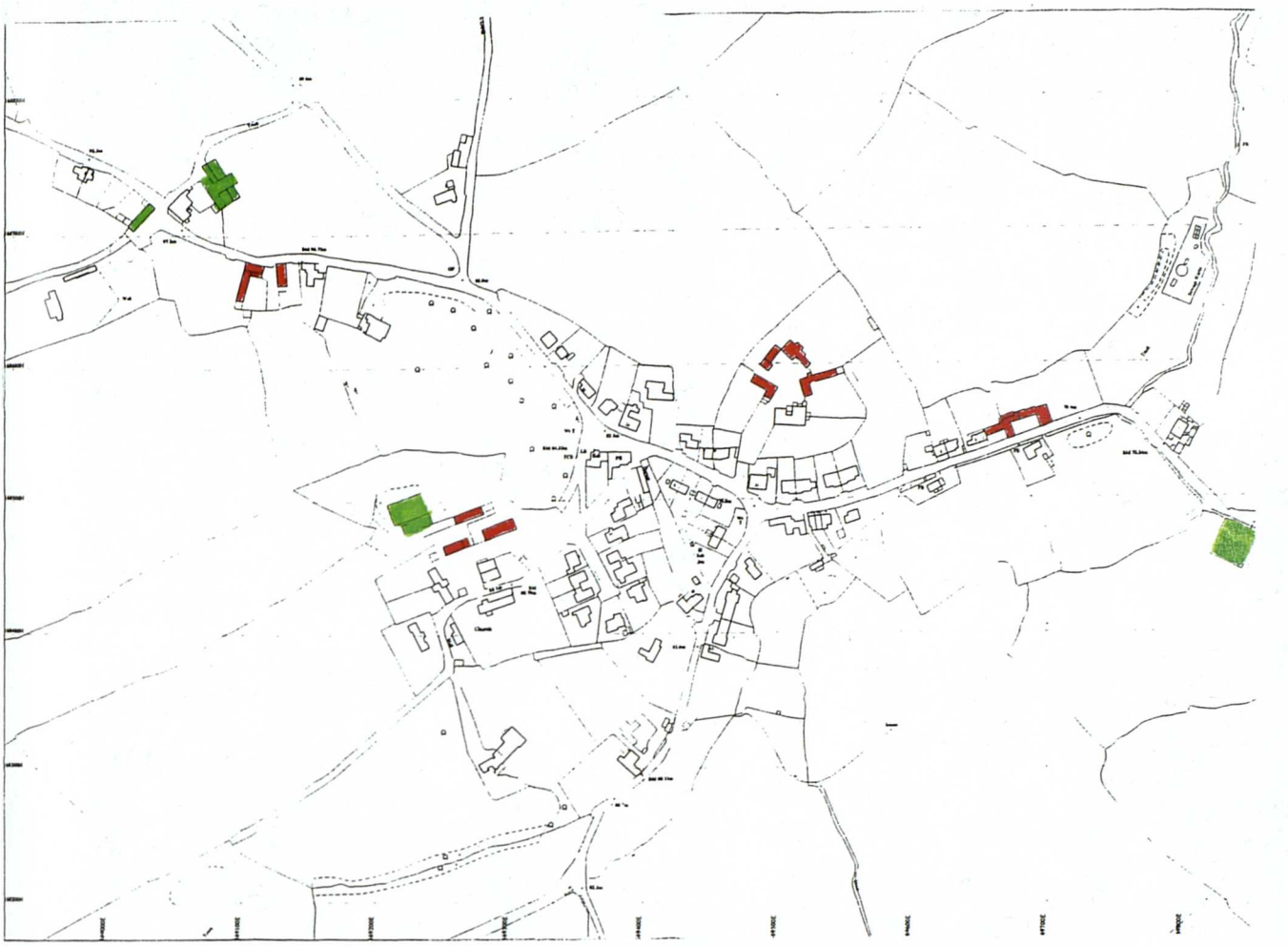


Fig 7.17 Map of Allswell showing former agricultural buildings now converted to dwellings (marked in red); and agricultural buildings still in use (green). The latter are predominately modern or more dated steel structures.

bulk of the farming is now based around a new unit built about half mile out of the village on the road to Wellsdon.

As considered in Chapter 2 elements of agriculture are deeply embedded in notions of country idyll and country childhood idyll, consequently the de-agriculturalisation of Allswell, and of the countryside (in 'traditional' farming terms) more generally, presents a substantial challenge to established notions of idyll. This is born out by the interviews in which a number of adults expressed regret at the retreat of the farms from the village. Iris who lives almost opposite Valley Farm told me

> It was wonderful, because - we had no objections, and were very sad when, um we knew the Tanner's were selling up, or giving it up, because the cows looked in at us, and the tractors - and it was a hive of activity, in a small way down here. It was much more lively then because all day long there were, what ever it was, muck spreaders, or tractors... and I've got photographs of harvest time, with five tractors and their trailers, all lined up on the bridge, waiting to send their bales up the elevator. I'm doing my best to create it with Alan's sheep (6.15).

This last remark refers to the fact that Iris, having bought the field enclosing her garden on the spilt up of Valley Farm, was letting it out as grazing to a local farmer who relies on small pockets of rented land on which to graze stock, partly at least to retain agricultural activity as spectacle.

When I asked Gwen - can you remember any of the farms before they were turned into houses? - she told of her memories of the same farm....

> - Fred Tanner's, because I used to spend half my days down there. *(Right you used to walk down there did you?)* Yes and watch the milking, Jim, - needed to be occupied all the time when he was a baby, so I used to be out all the time. So Fred Tanner's yes... and we used to go and watch them, the tractors, we used to spend many hours in the barn, and we'd go through- this is the big wheel, this is the little -. So we'd spend a lot of time down there (10. 4).

(This is the same farm where Margaret Fields and her daughter used to go and watch the milking 'every day'). Gwen went on to say how she felt that the break up of the farm, which meant her younger child did not see it as her older one had done, had made a 'big gap' in his life.

> - big change for us when (the farm went) um, big gap in Peter's life, because he didn't have the same experience really. I mean, we'd go and see the cows coming in, and stuff, and the calves there (10.4).

Here Gwen is comparing the experiences of her two children one who was old enough to have been taken to the farm before it was sold up, the other not. But unless such a specific circumstance occurs the impact of the loss of the farms in the village is lessened by the relative temporal specificity within which these experiences are set. For people moving into the village since the farms have been converted, it still feels quite 'rural' and some farming is still in evidence. They did not experience the village with the farms, so they do not have the comparative perspective which Gwen and other longer term residents have. But even some of these longer term residents may not be so effected by the retreat of agriculture from the village, if, as parents, the years in which the farms and farming would be a spectacle for their children fell before the break up of the village farms, and by which time the children had 'grown out' of that phase. Children of course, particularly younger ones, also do not usually have the requisite stocks of experience to appreciate these changes in comparative terms, but the nature of childhood in Allswell has nevertheless been affected through the changing material and symbolic spaces of the village.

The conversions of the old agricultural farm yards and building into domestic spaces has had a considerable effect on the nature of the village. It has eradicated most of the different sorts of spaces such sites provided, and also the spectacle of farming in the village. Figs 7.18 to 7.20 show 'before and after' pictures of three of the farmyards which have been through either total or partial conversion. The loss of these farm spaces has definitely contributed to a tidying up of the village and also a reduction in the variety of spaces potentially available to children. It will be shown in the next chapter that children do use the remaining part of the yard at Manor Farm as a play space in ways which are now lost at the other sites, and how more generally a variety of (other) space is seen as significant in terms of children environmental needs.

7.3.4 Cars and Traffic

Laurie Lee says in *Cider with Rosie*, that he witnessed 'the end of a thousand years' life' (1962, p. 216), and this was when the first 'brass-lamped motor-car came coughing up the road, followed by the clamorous charabanc; the solid- tyred bus climbed the dusty hills and more people came and went' (ibid). Similarly Hurst, in his article about Allswell, also recognised the car as the chief harbinger of change. 'The coming of the motor-car spelled the demise of the village many years ago, but it has taken many decades for us to realise the true implications' (p. 1, undated). The thinking behind such sentiments is that the increasing personal mobility, and the extension of social, economic and cultural networks from the village, slowly dissolved the closeness and closedness of villages. Chris Smith (who claims to be the 'oldest newcomer' to the village) recounted the beginnings of this transformation while recalling later new-comers to the village who moved in next door to his family.

> ...and professional people moved in (next door). Now he was a toffee nosed little blighter, the son. He actually did come bell ringing, because we were all in the choir, but there were one or two who were gradually creeping in, one or two families were creeping in, and you'd find they really did not want to mix, mix too much with us. *(was he a similar age to ?)* yeah, Thomas, yeah, he was all right, but he wasn't like us really. He was different (laughs). *(Did he go to the school?)* Oh no, he went to Bath...People were now having motors you see, actually commuting in and out (23.3).

In this quote is also the beginnings of the transfer of the village from working to middle class, a change also borne by the motor car. Undoubtedly the changes wrought by such processes have been profound, but, as I have already argued, the village as a community has, to an extent survived such processes, or rather has been recreated in new forms, through new , if less cohesive, ways of building some

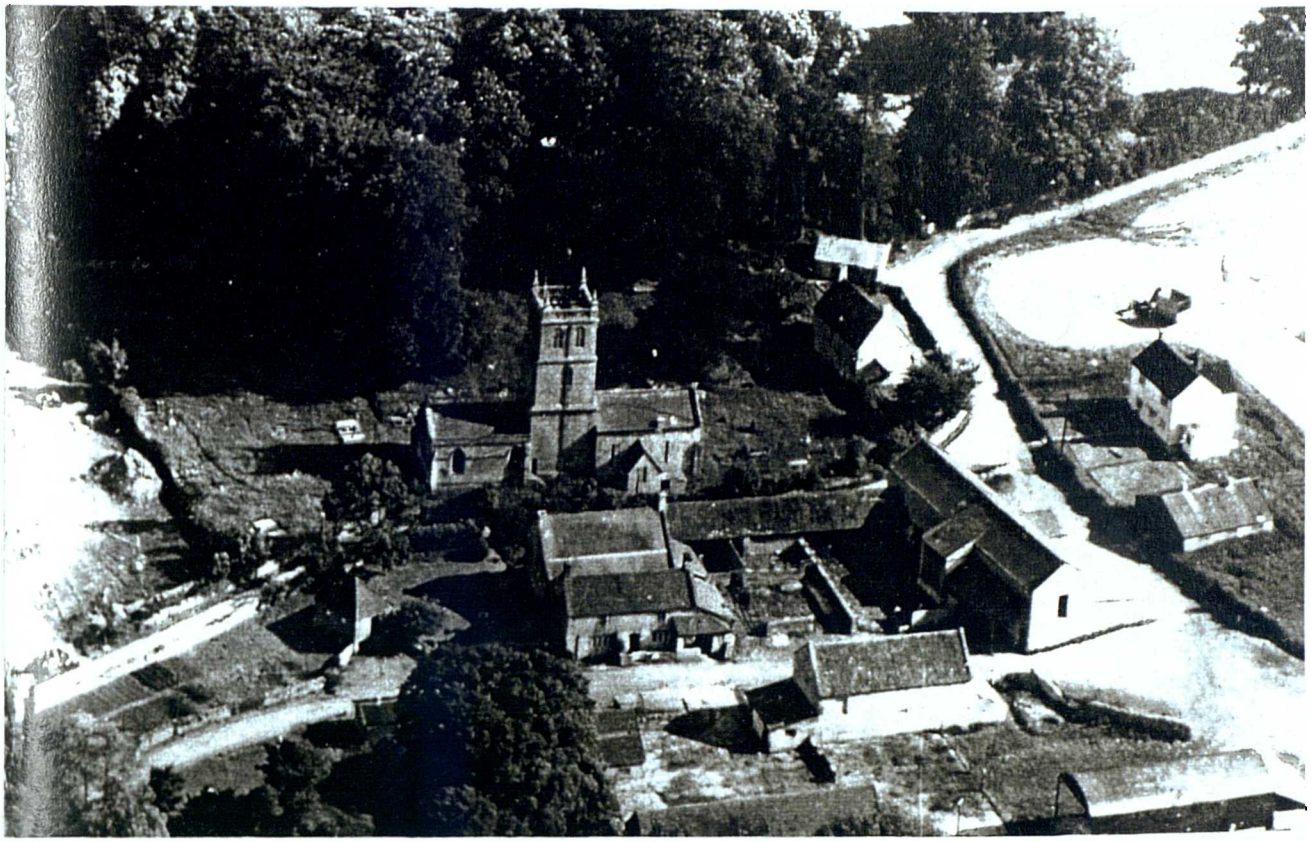


Fig 7. 18 Before and after pictures of the development of Manor Farm. (The barn in the lower picture is the large barn at the right hand side of the farm complex on the top picture, photographed from the church tower).

Fig 7.19 Before and after pictures of the development of Valley Farm. (The sheds in the foreground of the top picture were demolished leaving the older stone barn clear for conversion and ground clear for the forming of a garden).

Fig 7.20 Before and after pictures of the development of the main barn at Crest Farm. (Note in the top picture that children are in the old barn).

community identity which are related to the traditional images of village community, but acted out in differing class, economic and cultural contexts.

Apart from the car as being a means and a symbol of the opening up of, and changing of, village communities, with all the implications these had for village life and village childhood, it also had a more direct influence on the shape of village children's lives. With the increase in traffic density and speed within the village, has come increasing restriction of children's movement around the village. In some cases this is quite drastic and is mainly due to fear of accidents, but is also the fear of the car as a tool in crimes against children.

The road, although still not a route of much through traffic, and still considered quiet, is definitely seen as a place of danger. In some senses, a quite road is seen as, and possibly is, more dangerous than a busy road, in that children can be lulled into a false sense of security about running out into it, and also, as evident in the section on innocence, the children are seen as inexperienced in terms of traffic skills unlike their city counter-parts. As one villager and parent put it, 'it only take's one (car) doesn't it'. Some cars do travel quite fast through the village and there are a couple of slow bends, which don't restrict speed that much, but do cut down lines of sight for both drivers and pedestrians. Some years ago a child whose drive opens of the road on one of these bends was hit by a car and had his arm broken. Jane, when discussing her children's mobility said

> I used to have to bike a mile to friends when I was a child *(how old were you then?)*. Um, eight, well we biked to school from the age of (pause) 5 or 6. *(They (Jane's children) aren't going to do that here really are they?)*. You don't let them on the roads do you, to bike, because its too dangerous (7.4).

Such concerns have led to a few parents asking the parish council to initiate traffic calming measures - maybe a 'drive carefully' sign and a few rumble strips to draw attention to it. The parish council decided to take this up and wrote to the local authority's transport department, but the reply came back that no funds could be allocated to the village because it was not in any way a priority in traffic calming terms.

In the past the road was much less a problem, and in fact, as in the case of urban streets, used to be a communal play space, which had many benefits, for example, most houses opened onto it, it was in between and overlooked by houses and thus

quite an enclosed and safe place. Tom told me how the road was a prime site for children's games.

> *(can you remember what sort of games you played when you were younger?)* Well it went in series. One time here it was tops. *(Tops being?),* spinning tops. *(Where would you do those?)* Anywhere in the road. *(Right. It had to be on the road?).* Oh yes, and the next one was marbles. *(was that on the road as well?),* Yes. *(Because there were no cars).* Because there were no cars. *(So did you play in the middle of the road?).* Oh yes. *(And then a horse and cart would come along every now and again?).* That's right. You would get out of the way and let them go by, and then put the marbles back where you had left them. *(Was it tarmaced?)* Oh yes, all tarmaced (17.15).

An old photograph of Allswell (fig 7.21) confirms such accounts by showing children playing on the main road. Such an image is unthinkable now.

I have already stated that a key feature in shaping Allswell and constructions of it, is its location on the road network. In comparison to many if not most of its neighbouring villages, and those in similar non-remote rural areas, it is very fortunate in the generally low density of traffic. For adults constructions of the rural idyll in general, this is an important factor, but the impact of what traffic there is has a much more significant impact on children's lives. For villages with much worse traffic problems the impact on the community in general and children in particular will be much more significant. The National Playing Fields Association (undated) found in their study of rural children's play, that the spatial range of children's activities were often defined by the presence of main roads which there were forbidden to cross unattended. More recently the increase in rural traffic has prompted the CPRE to publish a report, *The Lost Lanes of England,* which claims that 'cars and lorries are destroying country lanes and forcing people off routes where once they cycled, walk and rode in peace' (Observer 25 AUG 1996).
The village is strung out along three main lanes radiating from a central T junction. The road is the only straight forward means of getting from one end to the other. This serves to divide the village to a certain extent as quoted in the brief comment on micro-geographies. Some household are much more affected by the road than others. In many cases the houses will be fronted by the road (without a pavement, see below), backed by fields and either have other houses on either side, or in some cases, fields. Depending on the specific configuration of this bounding, some houses are virtually cut off in terms of younger children leaving the domestic space, unless with express adult permission and/or supervision.

Fig 7.21 Old photograph of children playing in Allswell high street.

Farmyards are often cul-de-sacs off roads and often down access lanes, so they become places where children can play without their guardians worrying about the danger of road traffic. This also make housing developments based on sets of farm buildings potentially quite conducive to the free movement of quite young children. Out of the 11 converted barns in the village, 8 are occupied by families with children. Of these all but one of them are in two clusters which form, along with adjacent original farmhouses, two enclaves which are set away from the roads. In the houses which were the barns Manor Farm, children as young as four can move from house to house, and to the barn, in the company of older children, without guardian supervision. Similarly the houses in the complex which was Crest Farm also have a group of children who could move from house to house quite freely, and have consequently 'grown up together'.

In all these ways cars and traffic have had a major role in restructuring the nature of rural childhood and the rural childhood idyll, and this ties in with more general concern expressed for example by (Green 1995), about the broader relationship between childhood and traffic.

PAVEMENTS

Most of the roads within Allswell, and all of the surrounding lanes, do not have pedestrian pavements and this makes the traffic danger to children even more prominent, and also somewhat ironically makes it appear less safe than much more heavily trafficked urban and suburban roads, where the pavement is seen as a clearly defined and relatively safe space for children to walk and cycle. Polly told me that where she lived her son Simon (7) could 'go to the shops by himself, ... get on his bike, its about two minutes away...he can cycle on the pavement, -its quiet' (19.1) whereas in Allswell she would not let him cycle at all. This reflects the attitudes of most Allswell parents who will not let their children cycle around the village or the surrounding lanes, until a much older age than might be expected.

This absence of pavements also has an impact on movement by foot. Elizabeth who had recently moved from London told me that her son George (4) was disturbed by the lack of pavements in the village because in London it had been drummed into him that he must stay on the pavement when out walking, or getting in and out of the car (fn #2), and he initially found walking in the village with his mother quite disorientating.

7.3.5 Schools

I have discussed earlier how the lack of a village school in some ways suits the village in its current social form in that it frees parents to make the education choices that often come in the contexts of their class and wealth. But more generally the notion of a village school is very much part of a country childhood, and it is also seen as a means of integrating the community. Diana told me that

> When I moved here I wanted Jack to go to the same school that most of the children in the village went to because I thought we are moving to a strange place, he doesn't know anyone and the most obvious place that they make friends is at school (14. 4).

So even though there is not a school in the village the idea of the local school being a place where children form relationships is still important. Diana's children in fact go to Wellsdon Primary School which together with another local primary school have been recently the quasi village primary schools. But this is changing and I heard a comment that one of the nearby fee paying schools was now becoming 'the village school'. The newer residents of the village accept it as it is without a school,

and either do not concern themselves that there is not one, or otherwise can effectively manage this missing element of traditional village idyll without it being to detrimental. But for older residents who had been to Allswell school and witnessed the village while the school was still open, the closing of it was seen as a much more significant moment. As Tom put it

> once the school was officially closed it was virtually the end of village life wasn't it, *(do you really think that?),* Yes I do, certainly I do (17.7).

This view of the village is fast fading. The life long residents are now in a clear minority so their view of the village without a school is not the prevailing one, also in terms of constructions of country childhoods it is the newer residents who now have children in the village and are more directly embroiled in constructions and practices of Allswell childhoods. The sharing and juggling of the school runs, where working parents, mostly mothers, work out joint rotas of dropping and picking up cars full of children, and often after-school child care also, is now very much part of the community practice within Allswell, and a symbol which has, to some extent at least, replaced that of the village school.

But undoubtedly the closing of the village school amounted to a major restructuring of childhood within Allswell. It played a major part in extending and fragmenting children's daily routines and social networks, particularly in Allswell's case where the children collectively attend a large number of differing schools, and the older children in some cases board. The images of country childhood as idyll considered in chapter 2, still carry a legacy of rural Britain before many of its country schools were closed[3]. Contemporary images of idyll have to cope with this change, and it has had to an extent - like the de-traditional agriculturisation of the rural - an eroding effect on the ability or opportunity to fit the practices of everyday life in Allswell to the imaginary idyll, but not terminally so. The closing of the village school is a part of the processes which have changed the village from a closed to open community, and as already discussed, a part that has had particular impact on the relationship between children and the village environment. It has played a major part in decentering children's lives from the village, and breaking down the completeness of the children's spatial, social and symbolic life within the village. If constructions and practices of childhood idyll remain, which I have argued that they

[3] In *Cider with Rosie* and *Lark Rise to Candleford* there are chapters headed 'village school' and 'school' respectively.

do, they have become more spatially and temporally partial, and more reflexively constructed.

To conclude this chapter I want to briefly consider the issue of whether Allswell should have a playground or other facilities set aside for the children of the village. when I asked this question in the interviews some people did have readily constructed opinions, in either one way or other, and it became clear that is was an issue that was sometimes discussed. Some people felt that a small 'rec' would provide the children with a clearly defined play space and a meeting point.

> (Jane) *(Do you think we need any sort of play area?).* I think a park would be nice, because at least then they could gather there. (especially for the younger kids) (7.4).

> (Margaret) Because the village hasn't got a park or a rec, there isn't one focal point for the children so they just sort of go in all directions *really and find their own little* spots. *(Do you think it should have?)* I think they probably would get together a bit more if there was a focal point (21.3).

> (Sue) I think it would have been lovely to have a recreation ground. Yes I do, it would be lovely, there was a lot of debate about it when our kids were young (over ten years ago)... I don't think it would do any harm to have a recreation ground where they could go and mess around with a football and meet people. It's sad that we haven't managed to do that (24.3).

But Sue also added 'there was a lot of talk about how dangerous it would be'; and Margaret went on to say

> Um, but there again I don't know whether that's altogether a good thing, because it becomes a sort of territory thing. Who does it really belong to, and I think it can set up rivalries, Well this is our bit (21.3).

And these reflect some uncertainty about having a playground in terms of control of children and the concentration of play in one area.

Victor, in his interview said that he did not feel the village needed a play area (3.17), Linda, his partner who had heard this, later said in her interview -

> I feel quite strongly, (he) said that he didn't think there was any need for a playground....may be it didn't come into his concept that children need that sort of thing, and yet he drives off to a playground in another village (with Christopher) (6.1).

Although there has been and still is some talk of a playground in Allswell, it is not by any means an 'issue'. It has never to my knowledge been raised at a parish council meeting or in the parish magazine, or been the subject of any form of organised campaign. This is indicative of the constructions of the village as a childhood environment which offers play opportunities, and constructions of childhood in the village as being a fulfilled and natural condition. The provision of a play area and

the discussion, and planning which would precede it, I feel would entail a direct questioning of the village in its present state as a country childhood idyll, which the some people would find jarring to their constructions of the village. This clearly has a structuring influence on the children's lives of Allswell in that the provision of dedicated play spaces is very unlikely. In my interview with the Local Authority manager who oversees play space provision, I was told that the authority would only consider the provision of some form of play facility if there was a demand from the community which was articulated through a group such as the parish council or a pressure group. This is despite the fact that 'The Children's Act 1989, lays upon local authorities a duty to provide a range of services to children in need' (National Children's Play and Recreation Unit (1992, p. 7) and that 'high quality play provision' was envisaged as part of this policy (ibid). Now this begs the question of whether children in Allswell are in need, but the National Voluntary Council for Children's Play (1992) state in their *Charter for Children's Play* that children with play needs are those who are

> single children at home; children in high rise blocks/flats; children living by busy roads; children in hospital; children with disabilities and special needs; children living in temporary accommodation; children living *in areas with inadequate play provision; children in rural areas*; children who are denied access to play opportunities because of racism, sexism and cultural constraints; children living in institutions; travellers children; children who are not allowed out to play because of fear for their safety; children visiting relatives in prison (1992, p. 4, emphasis added).

So the local authority is in fact failing in its duty under the 1989 Children's Act by not even considering if children in Allswell do have pay needs or not, particularly when it is considered that the situations listed above, can often overlap creating spaces of multiple disadvantage within a rural or any other type of setting. This is in turn compounded by the on-going failure to consult children themselves. Lane (1997), in his review of the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child at International, national and local levels, states that in local authority business; 'children's needs and wishes should be taken into account in relation to services and systems. Children should be involved in planning local authority services... Children need to be involved in any decision-making that affects them' (p. 5). The disregard of (the assessment of) children's needs in Allswell, and of their own voices, is fuelled by the adult constructions within the village itself which are enmeshed in popular discourses of country childhood idyll. This is a clear example how these constructions do have structuring effects on children's lives and rights[4].

[4] To be fair to the local authority, who are subject to painfully tight fiscal constraints, there was a degree of sensitivity to children's needs in rural areas. When I suggested there were 'strong assumptions about the fact that rural areas still have free and natural places for children to play' the

Of course these notions and practices of idyll are not the only structuring forces on childhood in Allswell or even the most significant ones. Other factors ranging from state action to family relationships, and from the cultural to the economic are also profound structuring forces on children's lives. What I have tried to concentrate on is a set of discourses and practices which relate specifically to rural childhood, and which interact with the other structuring forces by the projection of notions of the rural being a childhood idyll into these other structuring forces, and how this is entangled with the local scale through both specific placed based reconstructions of these notions and how these are enmeshed with the (changing) material and symbolic identity of that place.

---

reply was 'well they don't' (1.5). I was then told how in another larger village about twelve mile west of Allswell a new play area was being planned, after the village had expressed concern about the lack of play opportunities.

CHAPTER 8

EXPERIENCED FROM WITHIN? TOWARDS THE OTHERNESS OF CHILDREN?

The heading of this chapter is marked with question marks because of the considerable difficulties and uncertainties in effectively reconstructing children's worlds from an adult, academic vantage point. The range of such difficulties is substantial, spanning from broad ontological issues of our constructions of childhood to more practical issues of research methodologies. But addressing these issues can be seen as the critical 'front-line' which ranges across academic, political and professional engagements with children/childhood. There is a whole range of issues surrounding children's rights; their status and competence; and the provision of welfare and education, which are being reshaped by the acknowledgement that the voices of the children themselves have to be heard and that their experience 'from within' has to be taken into account. As Keith White (1997) put it in regard to

> the careful listening to children's feelings and wishes envisaged under the Children's Act.. (-) If we do not enter into a child's sense of space and time we cannot begin to understand him or her.... What is the child's mental map? Without it the listener is irretrievably lost in any attempt to plot a path through the child's world (p. 2).

This ambition of representing children's worlds as 'experienced from within' can be set within the concern for otherness which has been a key theme in some recent fields of social theory, including concerns for postmodern rural geography (Philo, 1993; Murdoch and Pratt, 1993). Such concern for the other, almost inevitably leads to speaking (for) the other and here lies a fundamental problem which is, as Bauman (1993) puts it, 'the Other is recast as my creation; acting on the best of impulses, I have stolen the Other's authority' (p. 91). Although such concerns are pertinent to all research which speaks for others, it is particularly so for that of children for a number of reasons.

Firstly; the large imbalance in power relations which almost invariably exists between children and adults is a key factor. Secondly; the differences between adults and children are profound, and increasingly so the younger the child is. This presents fundamental problems, some of which may not be surmountable. On this White (1997) writes

> The one thing is sure: if we think we can understand this children's world with forays, questions, reviews, procedures, programmes, and plans, we shall fail. If we, on the other

> hand, sense the intrinsic value of their particular story and their sense of time and place, we may not ever .... fully understand, but we will at least know how little we know and cease to pretend that we know exactly what they mean and why! (p. 2).

Thirdly, as I have written elsewhere

> we have all been 'children', or at least biologically young, so perhaps uniquely in this concern for a form of otherness, we have all been that other once, and may still contain some form or traces of it. This raises the question of whether it, or elements of it, are retrievable through memory, or whether the *illusion* that it is, in fact makes the other/other even more inaccessible and invisible[1]... Once superseded by adult stocks of knowledge, those adult filters can never be removed to get back to earlier states. Adult constructions and memories of what it is/was to be a child are inevitably processed through adultness. From adult perspectives children's geographies may well appear bizarre and irrational, and the challenge is to translate these into the rational language of academic research and writing, without in the process, loosing these very characteristics which may be at the centre of understanding children's geographies (Jones, 1997).

We have to be wary of imposing 'otherness' rather than being open to it. This issue Philo (1997) considers in *Of Other Rurals?,* in which, as a strategy for building on his original argument for sensitising rural geography to 'otherness' (1992), he turns to Doel's consideration of these matters. Philo shows how Doel, drawing from works of Derrida and Deleuze, argues that the moves towards otherness evident in some initiatives within geography, are moves towards 'the Other of the Same' rather than the 'Other of the Other'. The Other of the Same is an imposition, a construction rooted in the Same, which often, in the end, is serving the Same, either in terms of identity formation/justification, or power relations between the Same and the Other. This can by seen as a conceptual mapping of the how writers such as Warner see adult (Same) constructions of childhood (Other of the Same) to be more about adultness than about the actual condition of being a child (Other of the Other). So any research addressing childhood has extremely alert to these issues. Given the theme which Doel develops, and which Philo admits haunts his chapter (footnote no. 3), and other work, - that the very processes of rational thought, especially the highly formalised variety of conventional academic writing, may never get beyond the other of the same. This is a fundamental question concerning researching children's worlds, as Aitken (1994) puts it

---

[1] Aitken (1994) makes the same point in very similar terms, and refers to Schactel's (1959) theory of childhood amnesia' which results in adults being unable to 'cognitively process early childhood experiences. Our mental structures have changed to the extent that we have great difficulty in imagining the world of the child' (p. 30). As a result Aitken suggests , the 'study of children as *other* echoes *most glaringly the current crisis of representation in the social sciences*' (ibid, second emphasis added). Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (1992), also point to this as being 'one of the deep paradoxes of finding out about childhood....having been children (and therefore having 'known' childhood at first-hand), and yet having no direct - only represented - access to that experience' (p. 19).

> children see things in environments that we, as adults, have forgotten how to see, let alone understand. As adults, we can no longer empathise with or imagine what children experience, so how can we write for them or establish agendas on their behalf (p. 29).

Such difficulties are not resolved merely through their recognition. Thus Philo (1997) advocates Doel's stance which is identified as 'waiting for the call of the "Other" - somehow remaining open to the (perhaps contingent) approach of the Other, rather than seeking for it in ways which may well, (paraphrasing Doel), colonise, acquire, capture, and overcode - make the Same.

To these conceptual uncertainties has to be added the relatively sparse heritage of research with children[2] as a resource for building methodological approaches which overcome these and many other problems of researching with children. Although there is now a momentum behind the move towards exploring children's geographies, this is still often done through the explorations of adult constructions of childhoods, as in the previous chapters of this work, and for example, Valentine (1997a), and Sibley (1995). Research with children themselves, in qualitative/ethnographic form, (which seem to hold the best possibilities for exploring such realms, as they do in adult worlds) is still relatively rare, but some key examples, and the methodological issues they raise, are briefly set out in section 8.1. In section 8.2. I then set out the methods used to research children's worlds in Allswell, and alongside them some of the constructions they produced; in section 8.3 I consider *some key characteristics* of children's interaction with their environments; in section 8.4 I look at these issues in terms of transgression and conflict - where geographies collide; and finally in section 8.5 I attempt to address issues of the otherness of children's geographies.

8.1 RESEARCHING WITH CHILDREN: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This section considers existing literature on research with children and then sets out the various techniques which were employed in this work. But before that the mass of research which can be grouped under the heading of

---

[2] Here there is an important distinction between research ***with*** children, and the massive body of work which centres around various issues of development, which is centred not on children's worlds so much as the production of adulthood.

'developmentalism' is addressed, for although there is relatively little research into children's constructions of their worlds which could be said to be epistemologically sympathetic to the orientation of this work, there is a huge mass of research into childhood which needs to be accounted for, albeit briefly.

8.1.1 'Developmentalism'

Moore (1986) when recounting the beginnings of the research for his book *Childhood's Domain,* tells how the child development literature and other disciplines he initially turned to, proved to be barren of the kind of child centred approach he was hoping to adopt.

> The first step was to review the child development literature, hoping to find research results that would offer guidance to a designer interested in the support of human needs. The search was almost fruitless. Most research did not reach beyond five-year-olds; nearly all came from work conducted with special problem groups under isolated conditions, in laboratories, clinics, or psychologist's offices. Hardly any related to ordinary children in setting of everyday life...I moved along more shelves, scanned more bibliographies, now on the lookout for educational research relating to children's environments. I found almost no indication that investigation of children's everyday surroundings was an important or valid topic. Geography covered just about everything - except life down the street. History likewise (p. ix).

Moore also stated that his work should be seen as 'a close relative of Colin Ward's marvellously expansive and erudite *Child in the City* - a book which set a new intellectual tone for investigating children-environment relations' (p. xiii). Moore's intention in *Childhood's Domain* can be seen as a pre-echo of Philo's concern for children's geographies, but in an urban rather than rural setting, in that he was concerned with how children experience urban environments 'from within'; how they are effected by various structuring forces; how they subvert or oppose these; and how such considerations can be used to re-orientate urban design, and the provision of facilities for children.

The problem that Moore had, although somewhat overtaken by more recent developments, still has resonance today, and sets out a unnerving problem faced in the 'literature research' element for a work such as this. There is a vast mass of research into children and childhood which one feels must be of use, but time and again, promising looking volumes were unearthed only to be revealed as mostly barren.

The reasons for this may be detected in Stainton-Rogers and Stainton-Rogers (1992), who produce a substantial and detailed critique of academic

approaches to childhood which have been predominately clustered around what they term 'developmentalism'. This they claim has rested on the fulcrum of the discipline of psychology, and was concerned with

> the way children are socialised, and grow up to be fully fledged members of the adult community. So powerful did this project become, that until very recently, *virtually everybody working in any area concerned with children assumed that the findings and the theories of developmentalism, were* ***the*** *knowledges, and the* ***only*** *knowledges worth considering* (p. 9, non bold emphasis added).

They go on the claim that all the differing approaches within developmentalism bare the hallmarks of, 'early modernity, and hence predominately reflects modernist concerns for the controlled evolution of society (including its youngest members) informed by an ideology of scientism' (p. 37). This last point is significant in that it taps into all the critiques of positivist science which have been well aired in a number of arenas within the social sciences, and all these, according to the Stainton-Rogers', are clearly visible in developmentalism - not least an uncritical view of what childhood is, and how it may be socially and culturally constructed. Consequently they concur with Morss (1990) who they quote as saying 'developmental psychology is built on foundations that are rotten. Not only its more classic formulations, but also in its present day versions adhere to outdated notions of a biological-philosophical nature' (p. 41).

To replace these outmoded approaches, the Stainton-Rogers' advocate a 'polytextualist approach' which can be identified as postmodern in orientation. Within this, epistemological ambitions emerge which move much more closely to the orientation set out by Philo (1992; 1997). They ask 'how...do we discover what children are like, what is it like to be a child, and what 'being a child' means' (p. 15). Amongst the techniques espoused for doing as such, the listening to the stories told by the children themselves is central; but they add such 'texts' have so far been generally dismissed within our culture (p. 34). This call for a new approaches to the study of childhood, is also paralleled by Prout and James (1990), which, according to Pilcher and Wagg (1996) is

> a seminal account (which has) in effect, set out a new paradigm for the sociology of childhood. This paradigm is more interpretative. It challenges notions of the natural or universal character of childhood and it assumes instead that childhood is processual and perpetually in flux, subject to the understandings and experiences of children in their specific social contexts...Two features of this new approach are particularly important. Firstly, childhood is now seen as an institution which represents the ways, varying across time and cultural place, in which the biological immaturity of childhood is understood. Secondly, there is a concern to 'give a voice', albeit by adult mediation, to children as social actors who are themselves engaged in constructing and reconstructing this institution (p. 1).

In such circumstances of the domination of developmentalism and the only recent emergence of a 'new paradigm', it is not surprising that work sensitive to the otherness of children in ways concomitant with emerging cultural/postmodern approaches are rare. And there is evidence that these divisions still infect some quite recent and significant geographical engagements with children/childhood. For example, this is commented upon by Sibley (1996) in his review of Matthews' (1992) *Making Sense of Place* (which explores children's developing understanding of place). Sibley is critical of the work's narrow specialisation in environmental psychology set in a developmental framework, which is explored in great (technical) detail, while other issues, such as the emerging literature on social/cultural constructions of childhood, and all the complex interplay of forces which effect children's use and construction of space, are ignored, or only touched upon. James (1990, 1991) and Sibley's (1991) exchange over childhood geographies, was prompted by geography's general neglect of childhood, but Aitken (1994) puts a rather more positive spin on this relationship and briefly reviews a number of geographical studies of some or other aspect of childhood, (notable early work being Bunge (1973); Bunge and Bordossa (1975); Blaut and Stea (1971, 1974); Blaut and McLeary (1970). More recently the work of Hart (1979, 1984, 1987); Moore (1986); Katz (1986, 1991a, 1991b, 1993); and others, has added to this heritage. But amongst this list he also includes Matthews (1992), as being significant in that it is one of the few attempts to systematically address issues of children's geography, but he does then qualify this in a footnote saying that Matthews' work, and that of Spencer et al (1989), are in fact 'fairly narrowly circumscribed by cognitive and environmental psychology.' (p.3). Given such cases, and the overall paucity of his list, it is difficult to see how Aitken can justify the objections he makes to Sibley and James's position (p. 3).

Within geography there is only a sparse heritage of research into children's worlds, and some key examples of that are not in sympathy with the approach that Philo (1992), Sibley (1996), and this work feel is important. Within other disciplines which do have a heritage of researching childhood, there has clearly been a critical break as charted by James and Prout (1990), and the Stainton-Rogers' (1992), which means that these cannot be turned to either for a legacy

of research from such a stand point. This shift within geography and other disciplines is also paralleled by changing attitudes to children's rights, and welfare provision.

Clearly what is required is the application of qualitative/ethnographic type research techniques which are, if possible, adapted to the problematic task of researching children's worlds, and some examples that do exist and the key questions they raise are set out below.

8.1.2 Qualitative Research with Children

A useful starting point on this issue is Fine and Sandstrom's (1988) small volume on 'participant observation with minors', which they state is intended as a commentary on qualitative research with children more generally. They explain that they wrote this in response to the situation that up until that point 'there has been no extended treatment of the methodological problems of qualitative research with children that integrates previous writings' (p.10). Yet they also added that their detailed search through 'sociology, anthropology, physiology, education, political sciences and even geography' revealed enough isolated examples to challenge the 'frequently' stated 'lament that not much research has been conducted on children' (ibid).

The methodological implications they distil from their own and other research projects are set out in a number of frameworks. First, and underpinning all, is that the attempts at equalling out power relations between researcher and subject - which they see as a hall-mark of qualitative approaches - are not 'fully tenable' in research with children, and much of their subsequent strategies are geared around dealing with this issue. They then address these strategies within four groupings; research roles open to adults; ethical implications; techniques for achieving rapport; and finally 'general problems involved in understanding children's meanings' (p. 14). In turn these issues are considered separately for the research with children of differing ages, for such are the differences which are presented by differently aged children that any generalised treatment of research with children over all, would be insufficiently 'targeted'. thus the three age groups they consider are 'pre-school'

'preadolescent' and 'adolescent' and these can be taken as being representative of the three ages of childhood.

They identify four possible research roles for adults working with children - 'supervisor', 'leader', 'observer', 'friend', - but stress these are ideal models which will become interpenetrated and complex in practice. From these four they advocate the 'friend' role with its emphasis on trust and respect (not evident in the 'observer' role), and it not having 'any explicit authority role' (p. 17), (which is evident in the 'supervisor' and 'leader' roles). These roles are cross-cut by differing kinds of 'cover' which essentially is the researcher's explanation of presence in the research situation. They suggest that 'explicit cover', 'shallow cover', and 'deep cover' are the three possible approaches. The first of these is a full and detailed explanation of the research; the second is a more vague - 'or less than completely candid' - explanation; the third is a policy of concealment of the research aims.

All these have differing problems and potentials depending on the research circumstances and the age of the children involved, and also differing ethical implications, but it is 'shallow cover' that they favour in that does not present the problem of trying to explain perhaps complex issues to children which 'explicit cover' would, and it does not come into such sharp conflict with the process of building trust which 'deep cover' might. These authors go on to consider other issues, particularly ones which may enhance access and trust. The first is 'for the adult to adopt (as far as is possible) the behaviour and values of the children...become a (group) peer' and the second is for the adult to 'employ social rewards and material gifts to promote acceptance' (p. 22). I would argue that both of these approaches seem questionable both practically and ethically, and are also contradictory, but they are born out of the considerable difficulties in gaining access to children and children's worlds. In my research some of these methodological issues were eased in that I have some degree of trust and friendship (or at least familiarity), with some of the children of the village. Essentially my research stance overall was a combination of friend, observer, and leader, but these were manifested in differing proportions within the differing research techniques which were employed. And throughout the project both with children and adults I have used a stance of 'shallow cover' which in

the case of some adults has just about become explicit cover in that I have had a number of conversations, or stabs at explaining, what I am 'up to'. In regard to the children this 'shallow cover' has varied with the age of the children and to the degree I already know them.

There are now a number of examples of qualitative/ethnographic research methods being deployed in the research of children, notably by (Katz 1986,1991a, 1993). These, Aitken (1994) feels

> offer a much fuller connection between theory and practice than traditional social science methods which tend to de-center the researcher from the study. Ethnographers also show a greater appreciation for the links between the physical environment and social and cultural reproduction than traditional developmental researchers who tend to reduce children to psychological phenomena and separate out the effects of the environment (p. 37).

But Aitken also focuses on the earlier work of Hart (1979) which adopts a more eclectic research approach. Here Hart produced a

> descriptive developmental study of children's place experience in a small New England Town. By living in the town for an extended period of time and using a multiplicity of methods, including direct observation, structured interviews, tests (e.g. mapping, model building, and games) and ethnographic interviews he was able to take an integrative look at the outdoor geographies of all the town's children. It is worth underscoring the point made by Spencer et al. (1989, 18) that by spending so much time with children and by recording so much of their outdoor activity, Hart demonstrated how much of children's experiences are missed by standard research traditions. Unfortunately, few researchers to date have been willing to expend this kind of effort (pp. 36, 37).

Although I cannot claim that my research with children represents the sort of scale and effort Hart employed, some aspects of his approach are present in my research. Firstly, due to the case study being my own village I have had the opportunity to study it over a considerable length of time. Secondly, as is set out below, I did employ a number of differing research techniques, and this did include being outdoors observing children using certain places. The scale and intensity of this overall approach was always going to be limited by my concentration on adult discourses of country childhood, which I took to be a key element of the forces structuring children's lives. But I did feel it was important to go some way towards how children experience the village from within. Firstly because bringing these two constructions together, and exposing possible dissonance (and resonance) between them, is key to the whole epistemological and ethical drive enshrined in Philo's (1992) approach. But this is a major task which cannot be fully tackled in a single piece of research of this scale, and so needs to be the focus of ongoing collective academic endeavour. But it also seemed vital to make some move towards this goal in a single piece of

research, which was dealing with a specific place at a specific time from one research position, for this creates an intimacy between the two narratives, which might be insightful, and which might is difficult to create through the interaction of differing research initiatives.

8. 2 RESEARCHING WITH CHILDREN: METHODOLOGICAL APPLICATIONS

Given the uncertainties set out above and also the potentially huge scopes which they open onto, the research done with children in this case was conceived as a series of exploratory experiments, which were intended to provide both methodological insights and also, if successful, at least glimpses into the children's worlds. As I had interviewed a high proportion of the parents in the village, it was inevitable that I ended up carrying out research with children whose parents I had also interviewed and this provided some opportunity for building narratives of the differing geographies of childhood within particular domestic settings.

The research techniques were essentially driven by three main approaches. Firstly, by trying to devise methods which made me the researcher as 'remote' as possible and consequently let the children tell their own stories without the dominating presence of an adult; secondly, to build (on) relations of friendship and trust I already had with some children; and thirdly, to maintain a stance of opportunism, by being open and flexible as situations - which seemed promising but often fleeting - occurred. This can be considered as a form 'of waiting for the other to call' in the most direct sense, in that if I was out on some non research activity and came across children doing something which stirred my curiosity I would switch if at all possible into 'research mode'.

The first motivation of 'remoteness' resulted in four research techniques: 1, giving children disposable cameras with which to record their outdoor play activities. 2, getting children to draw maps of their local environment. 3, getting children to interview each other. 4, interviewing younger children in groups they 'naturally' operated in, either sibling and/or friendship groups.

The second motivation of trust, overlapped with the former in the choice of children with whom I did interviews, the other research activities, and who I observed when they were out and about. For younger children I only approached those I knew fairly well already, apart from some with whom who I had some contact with when in group situations with older siblings. For children in the middle years of childhood I did approach some who I did not know very well. With these I felt that my status as a villager, my contact with their parents, and some of their peers, gave me a good chance of quickly establishing a degree of trust. I also interviewed some older children, whom I knew well, on a one to one basis, in circumstances which amounted to those of the adult interviews.

The final approach of opportunity resulted in a number of research events which cross cut with the first two set of approaches in terms of who I interviewed, when and where, and particularly in terms of observation. In the interviews I carried out with younger children, I concentrated on children that I know well and who are used to being in our house, (playing with our children), and who are used to me being around when they are playing in Manor Farm yard. I realised there were at least some opportunities for the total observer variant of participant observation, and this has made a significant input into the material set out below. Four 'sets' of children (i.e. siblings and/or close friends) were asked to do the various research methodologies, this was partly opportunistic in that these were the children I had best *access to, but it was also* useful in that a picture could be built up by adding the 'data' from each method together, and also it meant that the children had a chance to develop their ideas through addressing the issues from differing angles, and on more than one occasion.

Below I set out the various research techniques used and some indicative examples of the material they produced. Some of the techniques were found to be problematic and were not persisted with, (particularly getting children to interview each other), but they are all briefly included. In the last 3 sections of this chapter I begin to construct some aspects of children's geographies and child environment interactions, it will be seen that it draws most heavily from my observations of children playing outside, and also of the village more generally. Although the other techniques did generate some input into these later

considerations, it is quite limited and the reasons for this are briefly addressed after they have been described below.

8.2.1 Photographs

This research technique was aimed at getting to know what outdoor places some of the children used and which aspects of these places they would feel it was worth recording when given the freedom to take what pictures they chose. Aitken (1994) briefly reviews research which has employed this approach of getting children to take photographs or their local environment, and 'themselves in their local area' (p. 35), including his own work (Aitken and Ginsberg, 1988; Aitken and Wingate, 1993) and feels such an approach can 'empower' children, but that it's value is also limited by a number of factors, including the partiality of the results, and the specificity of the results. In this case I felt it was relevant as one of a number of small scale approaches.

Three disposable cameras were given to three groups of children, two sets of three siblings and one pair of friends. The children were simply asked to take the camera out with them when the went out playing, and to take pictures of each other when they were doing what the normally do, and also of the places they liked. Initially I was disappointed in the results this *achieved, but after* further consideration I realised that some useful material was gathered and that as a research technique this does have some potential.

There was a technical failure which wiped out all but two pictures on one film, and reduced the quality of a number of pictures on the second film. This was caused by the children taking photographs in dark overgrown places where there was insufficient light for the film and camera. Cameras without flashes had be bought for the sake of economy, with the assumption that it being summer and the children being outdoors, the light would be sufficient. In retrospect such a technique should always employ the more expensive disposable cameras with built in flashes.

The Nutbrown children - Freddy, Claire and Heather (aged 6, 8 and 10 respectively), took pictures[3] of the animals they have in their large garden and the spaces within and around the garden itself, and also a swing they have hanging from a tree. They took pictures of their rabbit, their dog and the chickens they have, but they also placed themselves in the pictures with these animals, showing solidarity with, and love for them (fig 8.1). They also took pictures of themselves on their swing (fig 8.2), of one of the fields which backs onto their garden (fig 8.3), and Freddy with the chickens (fig 8.4). Half the film was taken up with pictures of their dog - which was at the time in the last stages of puppyhood - 'fighting' with a length of frayed old rope (fig 8.5). This I think represents the delight children can get from such 'simple' pleasures. From my interview with these children and (participant) observation of them, (which is reported on subsequently), and the maps they also drew I realised that they do set great store with the outdoor spaces they use, and the creatures, albeit in some cases domesticated, with which they share these. I do I feel they do live

Fig 8.1 Freddy with Amber, and Claire with pet rabbit, photographed by their sister Heather.

[3] By those who appear in the pictures it seems that the eldest child had control of the camera, and it is difficult to tell who had 'editorial' control over what was taken, and these would be issues which would need addressing to improve this technique, but for now I will have to refer to 'them' collectively.

Fig 8.2 Claire Nutbrown on the swing.

Fig 8.3 One of the fields which back onto the Nutbrown's garden.

Fig 8.4 Freddy Nutbrown with the family's chickens.

Fig 8.5 Amber, the Nutbrown's dog 'fighting' a length of old rope.

out some form of country childhood idyll, and this is actively encouraged by their parents. This is in part due to the fact that that their garden is in part a large tract of rough open space and woodland, but they do also venture out into the fields and down to Manor Farm quite frequently, and for the first time in the summer of 1996, I have seen them cycling around the lanes.

The Greyson children, Chris, John, and Mary-Jane, (aged 6, 10, 13, respectively) live at Valley Farm and have the run of the land which was retained with the farm house when the farm was split up. This also contains overgrown areas and patches of woods. The Greyson children's film, which again appears to also be shot by the eldest child, has a number of parallels with the Nutbrown's film. Animals feature, with their pet goat and horses, but not to the same extent. Some of the pictures capture the feeling space around their house, (fig 8.6) and the fields in which the family's horses are kept (fig 8.7). Again the children also framed themselves within these scenes (fig. 8.8). They also chose to photograph some rough overgrown areas (fig 8.9), the overgrown stream (fig 8.10) (Site 10 in Ch. 6), and the woods which run alongside the stream. Unfortunately some of these pictures go beyond the light range of the film, but those just within it, do show the overgrown nature of these. Finally there are photographs also showing the 'football pitch' and skateboarding on the road.

The photographs from these two films did show the children using the spaces in their gardens and beyond. But this reflects that fact that both these sets of children do have access to large areas of space through the extent of land owned with their respective houses, and that both sets of parents in differing ways have bought into the country childhood idyll, both in economic and symbolic terms. (They are both relatively recent incomers). So both sets of children do have access to domestic 'country space', and in the case of the Nutbrown children, they also range beyond that. The photographs the children came up with, are not strikingly counter intuitive to adult notions of country childhood idyll, they show that the spaces the children use and value, (this was confirmed in interviews and maps), *are* the space which their parents also value as childhood spaces on their behalf, and which they have, in these cases, have consciously provided through choice of domestic property, and, actively

Fig 8.6 The Greyson children's shot of the space behind their house.

Fig 8.7 Field with horses by the Greyson children.

Fig 8.8 Again the children also framed themselves within these scenes.

Fig 8.9 They also chose to photograph some rough overgrown areas.

Fig 8.10 The overgrown stream (Site 10 in Ch. 6), and the woods which run alongside it where the Greyson's den is.

encourage them to 'perform the idyll'. This confluence of childhood lives and adult constructions of them was also evident in Davis and Ridge's (1997) research into children's attitudes towards living in the countryside, for they found that 'for many of these children, the positive benefits of rural life were clearly in evidence showing that for some children the rural idyll is closer to a reality than myth' (p. 23)[4]. So this idea that some children are aware (to some, age dependent, degree) and appreciative of aspects of what is constructed to be the country childhood idyll is reflected by this and other research. What the photographs do not show is the imaginative interpretation put on these spaces, and also the bounded nature of them both in physical and control terms, and this is the biggest limitation of this approach. It essentially stops just at the point where the exploration of otherness might begin. A process of discussing the photographs with the children at a later date might be one means of developing this method, but this conclusion came too late in terms of this research.

[4] As indicated in Chapter 3, Davis and Ridge (1997) look at how poverty cut across these constructions of image and practice of the country childhood idyll.

8.2.2. Maps

In all 12 children were asked to draw maps. These consisted of the three Greyson children; the three Nutbrown children; Jack and Ruby, (7 and 9); and Sue (11, her brother Walter (9) and friend Wendy (10). Ten children returned maps, but these were executed with differing degrees of enthusiasm. Ruby was very enthusiastic and drew two, Jack, the Nutbrown Children and Emma and Sue made varying but considerable efforts, while the others were more brief. I was aware at the time that this was like asking the children to do a form of homework in their summer holidays, and the reception that the request got from the children, to a degree depended on if this was the sort of activity which might occur in their household anyway, in terms or drawing/making pictures, and also the extent to which the parents encouraged the completion of the project. The maps, bar one, are shown in figs 8.11 - 8. 20

All the children were given large pieces of paper and asked to draw their house in the middle of this and then draw around that the places they used and liked within the village and surrounding countryside[5]. Like the photographs these were confirmatory rather than anything else, showing that the children did use and value the spaces around their homes, which adult discourses saw them as using. But they do reveal points beyond that, and in general terms I feel the drawings do have more potential in revealing 'other' interpretations of space than photographs.

Firstly, the maps showed evidence of the use of the countryside (and some of the site set out in Chapter 6) by these children, but also the importance of social interaction with their peers, yet they also showed a considerable variation to the degree of environmental and social geography constructed by the children, and the spatial range of such. Wendy's map (fig 8.18) shows 'walks and rides' around the village and the stream . Arrows and paths indicate the penetration into the fields behind her garden, (from her 'den') and also into the field (site 2) behind the house of Sue, her friend who lives opposite. The toing and froing between the houses is highlighted by two prominent arrows. Sue's map (8.17) also shows the field, (site 2) calling it 'our' field; and Wendy's den. The church

[5] Eight of these children I had already interviewed, and talked to about my 'project' so they had some idea of the things I was interested in, the others were siblings of these.

yard tree (site 7) is shown, but a note is added that this place is 'scary after dark'. Sue also indicates that she must not play in the road, but can ride her bike there. John Greyson's map (fig 8.15) shows a friend's house in the village, the fields near his house and the den (site 11), his younger brother shows much the same only with fewer houses and details (fig 8.14). It may be significant that in these above maps, which are drawn by children whose houses front onto the road at the east end of the village, it is the road which is the common spatial framework on which they are based. In the other maps, which generally show a wider range, the road are not so dominant and this reflects the situations of the houses the children live in.

The maps reveal what can be seen as an alternative social geography, in which the village is constructed on differing terms. For example, (and I realised after, that this is common in children's speech), the children mostly refer to other houses under the names of the children who live there. On their maps Jack and Ruby, (figs 8.11/8.12) marked our house as 'Sam's house', and this followed in the other drawings. In Heather Nutbrown's map there is great detail paid to the route through the woods and fields which they take when walking down to Jack and Ruby's house and Manor Farm yard, This shows the woods (site 17), and the valley, stream and pond, (site 10, 11, 12) which are passed en route, and where I know Heather and siblings and friends Jack and Ruby sometime go exploring and playing.

The differences between the drawings done by children of differing ages shows perhaps the growing standardisation of older children's interpretation of space and representations of space. Jack in his map (fig 8.11) is clearly trying to give an accurate picture of Manor Farm Yard, where as Ruby's (figs 8.12/13) are much more a symbolic map with some spatial organisation. There seems to be an window within children's drawing skills, where the ability to effectively put things on paper overlaps with the more 'unstandardized' imaginative interpretations of space which younger children have. Thus Ruby gives a (delightful) diagrammatic interpretation of roughly the same space as Jack. Here there are glimpses of how this space is differently interpreted with features, which are apparently insignificant or irrelevant in terms of adult constructions of childhood use of this space, becoming prominent from within the drawing. For

Fig 8.11 Jack's map. This shows the farm yard, barns, tree house and rubble area which Jack has access to, and also some other features such as an old tree root on which children climb and a small copse in the Hall grounds which can be accessed by climbing over a low wall. Note: where households were identified by names on these maps this was deleted, with the exception of our (Sam's) house.

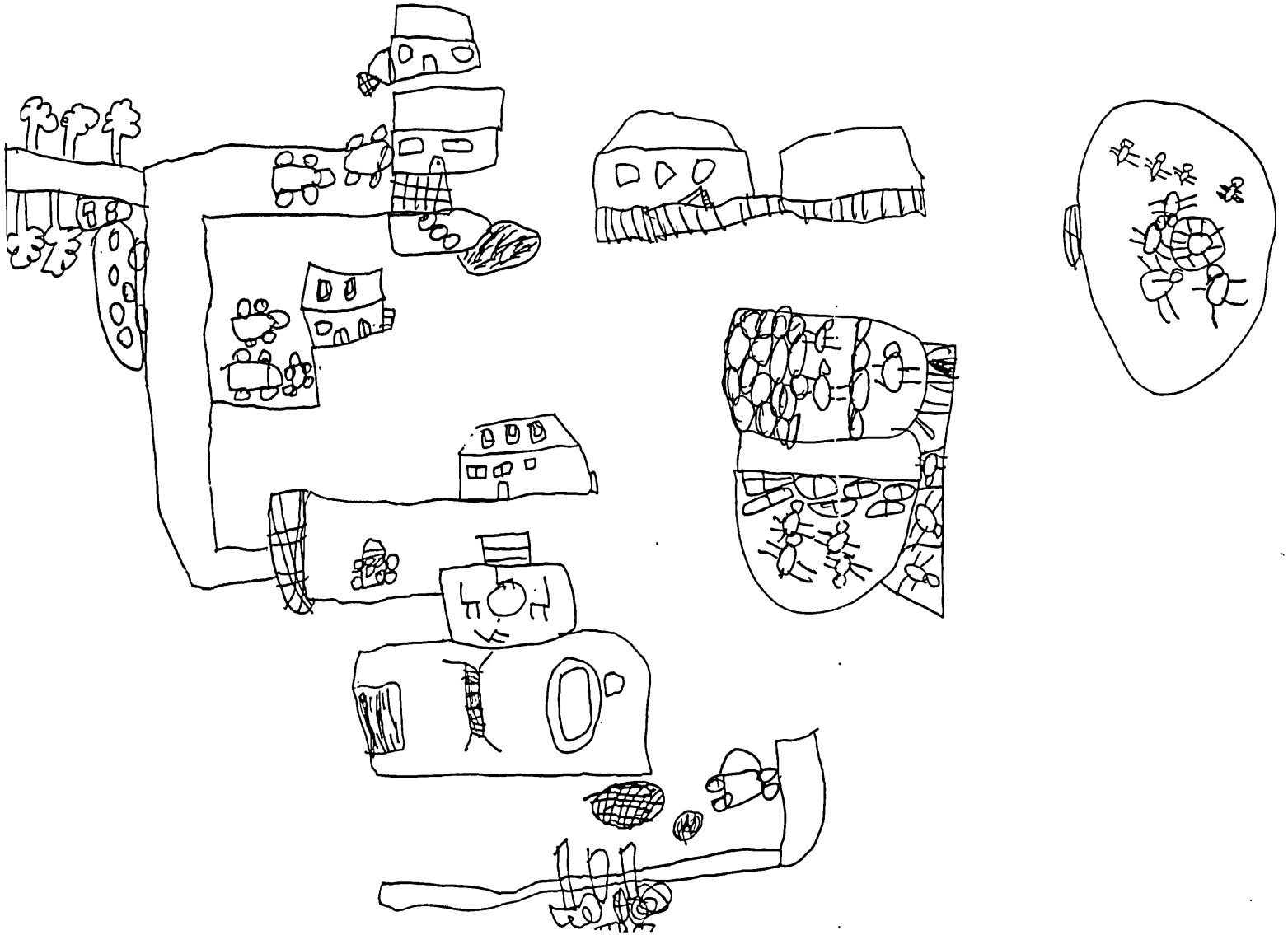


Fig 8.12 Ruby's first map. This shows roughly the same territory as her brother Jack's map, including - the tree house, rubble, the yard, the barns, and the surrounding houses. There are also many details, such as the sheep and the cows around a feeder in the field (far right); bales, horses, sheep and cows in the barns; and a fence that encloses the garden of one of the houses (top centre).

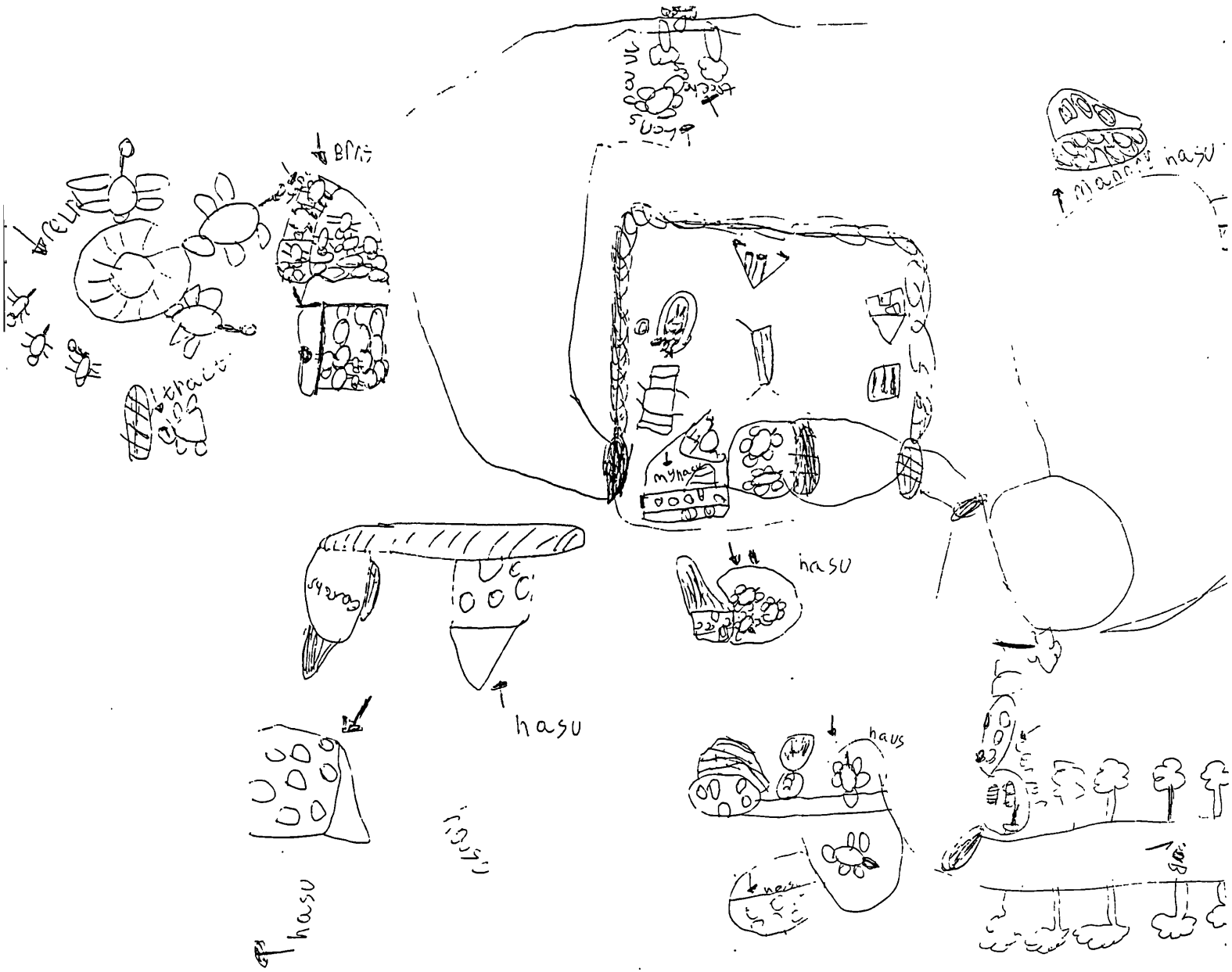


Fig 8.13 Ruby's second map. This shows much the same as the first but is developed in that some extra territory is added such as the Hall grounds, and other details are added and named such as the tractor and Walter's caravan. (This map was drawn upside-down in relation to Ruby's first map).

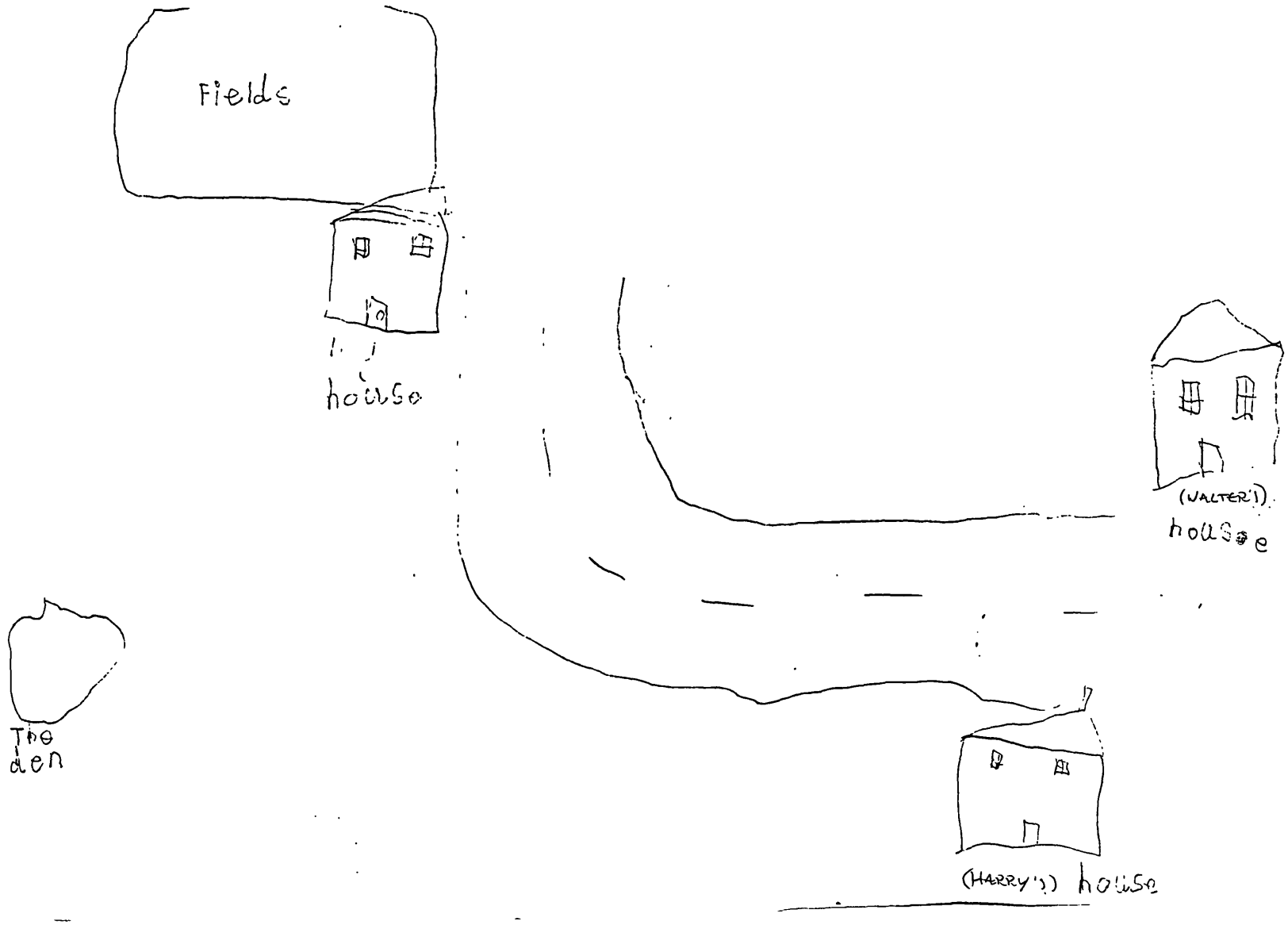


Fig 8.14 Chris Greyson's Map. This shows the den and the fields behind the family house and also the houses where friends live nearby. The road significantly, is the feature around which the map is structured.

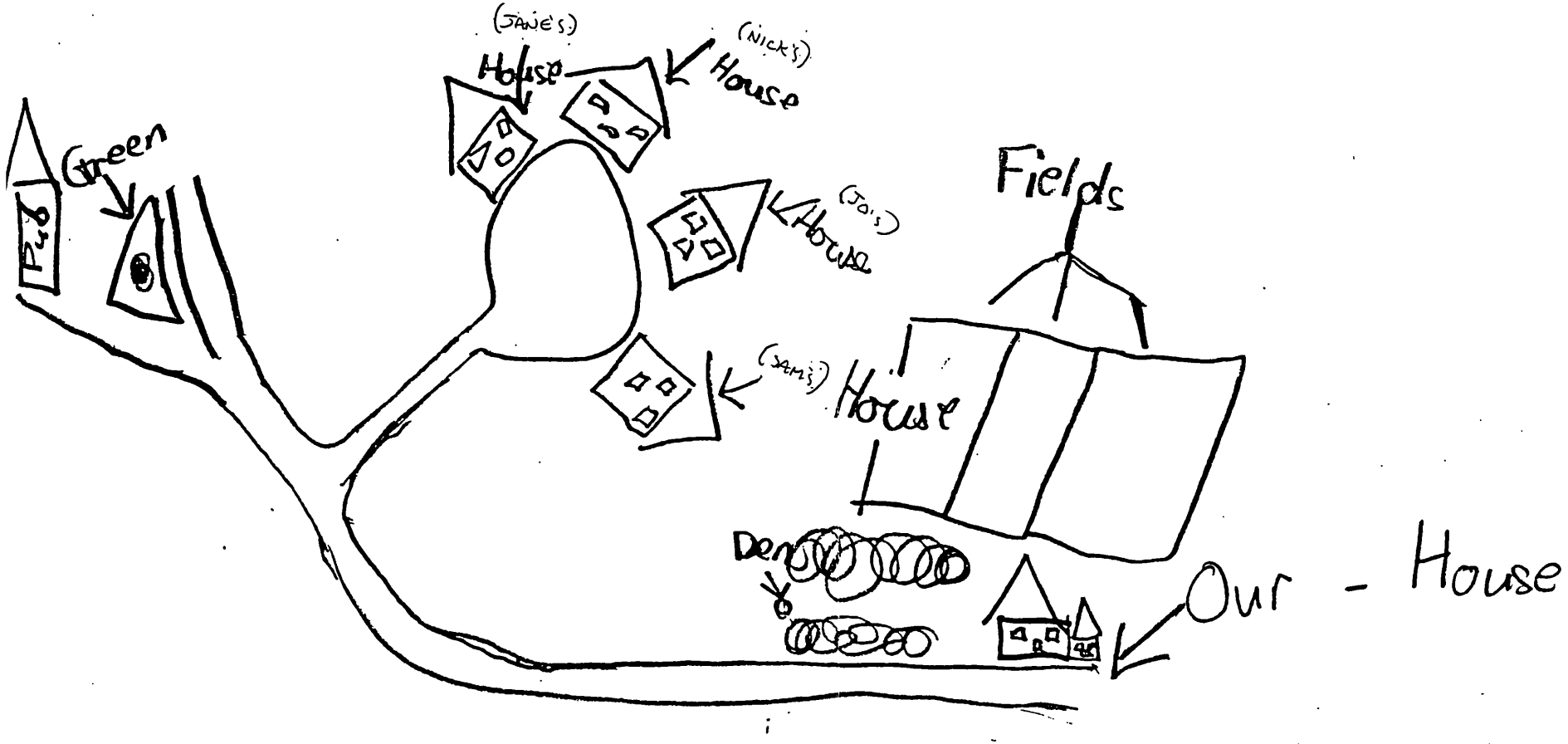


Fig 8.15 John Greyson's Map. This show the same elements as his younger brother's map (above), but with an extended social and spatial range, and more detail in the depiction of features such as the 'Green' and the 'Fields'. The circle of houses is Crest Farm one of the enclaves of converted agricultural buildings that I have already discussed.

Fig 8.16 Walter Field's Map. This map is again structured around the road and shows: the houses near Walter's house, with those of two friends identified; and the fields that are adjacent to Walter and the other friends' houses.

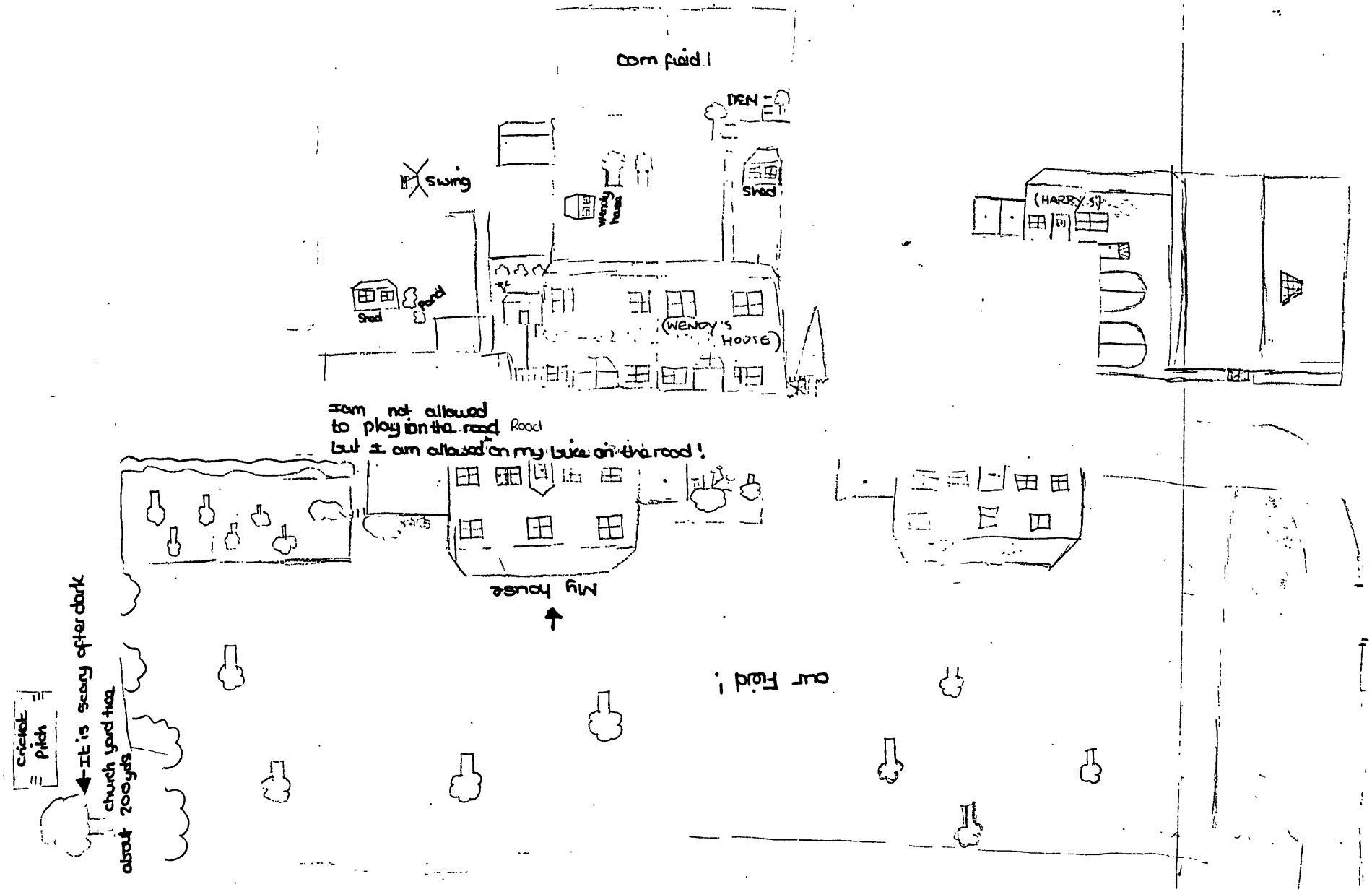


Fig 8.17 Sue Field's Map. Sue calls the field (site 2) at the back of her house 'our field!' She shows details of her friend Wendy's garden, the den they have there, and the 'corn field' which that garden backs onto. The cricket pitch and church yard tree (site 7) are shown, with the observation that 'it is scary after dark'. Sue writes she must not play on the road but can ride here bike there.

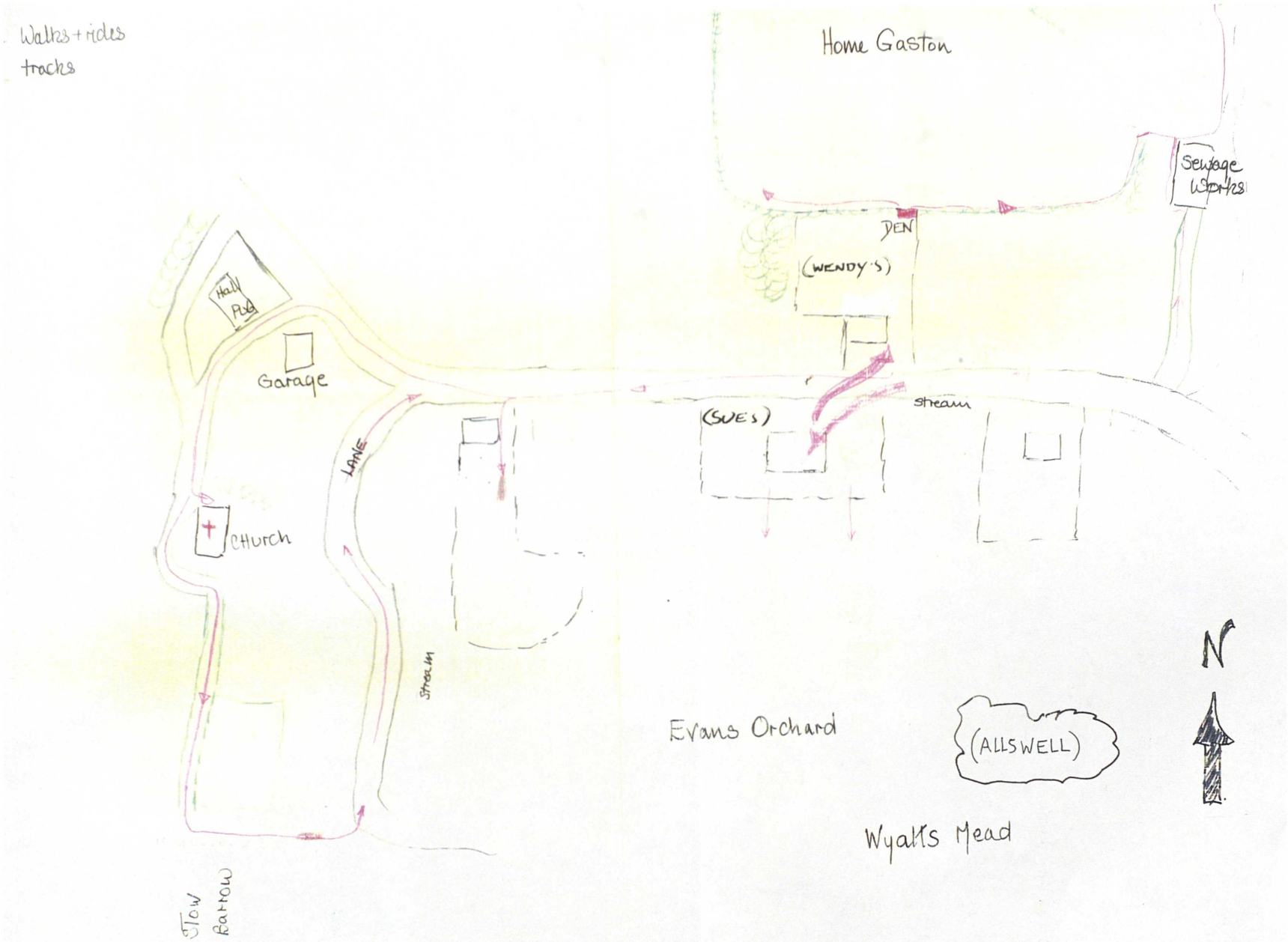


Fig 8.18 Wendy Hall's Map. As the key indicates, this map shows 'walks and rides' and 'tracks' around the village. These run along the lanes, footpaths and in some instances through the fields where there is not footpaths. Wendy's den is shown, and from that, tracks lead into the adjacent fields. Arrows also show access to the field (site 2) behind Sue's house, and the movement between the two houses is emphasised. The stream and other features are shown.

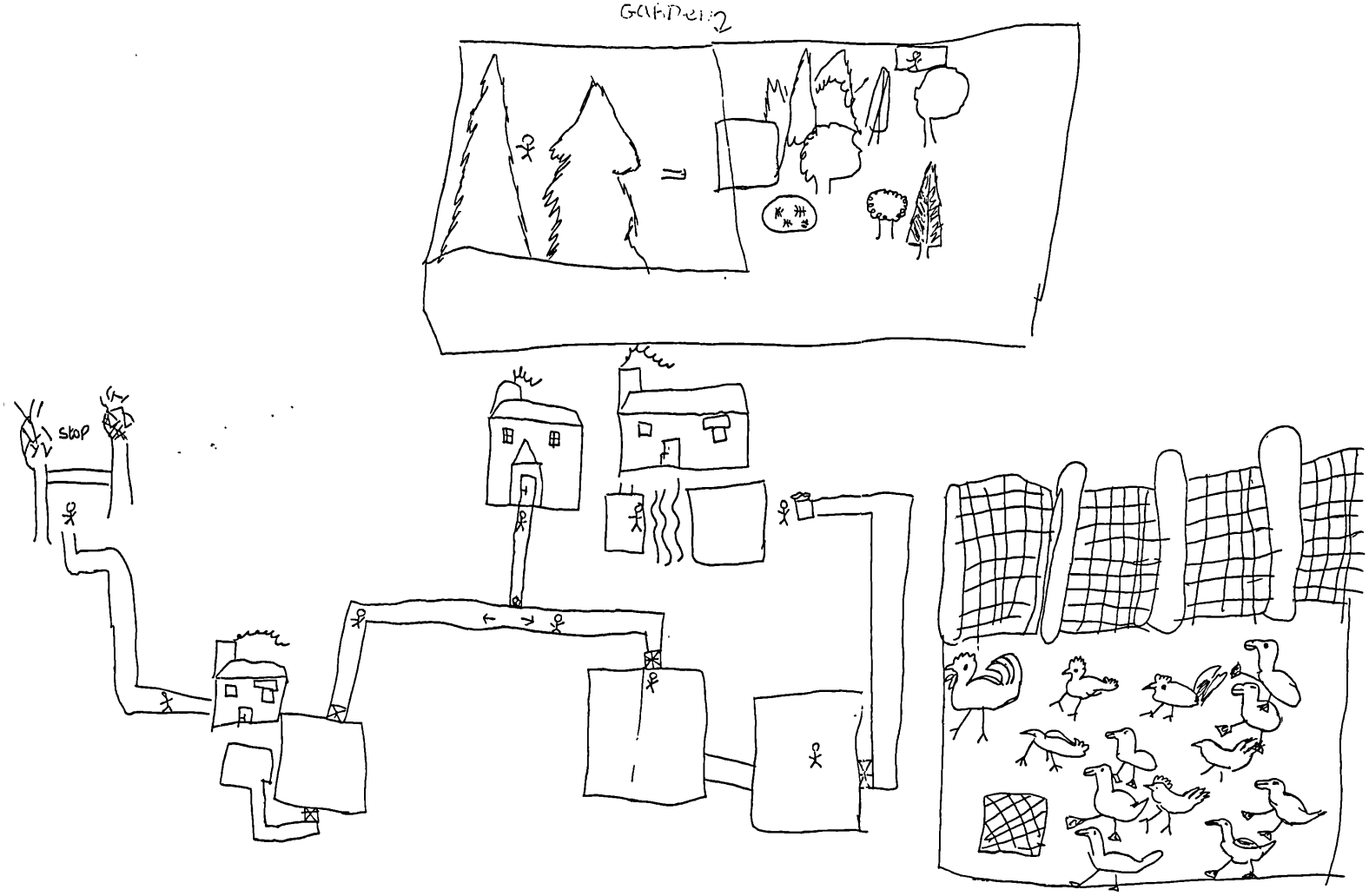


Fig 8.19 Claire Nutbrown's Map. I find this map quite hard to interpret in terms of what it depicts. The trees in the Nutbrown's garden are shown, as are the chickens, but I cannot really understand the paths and the routes marked out, although these may reflect the considerable spatial freedom the Nutbrown children collectively have. As with the photographs - a methodology of discussing the maps with the children once they were complete would overcome this problem of interpretation and add further layers of depiction to the maps.

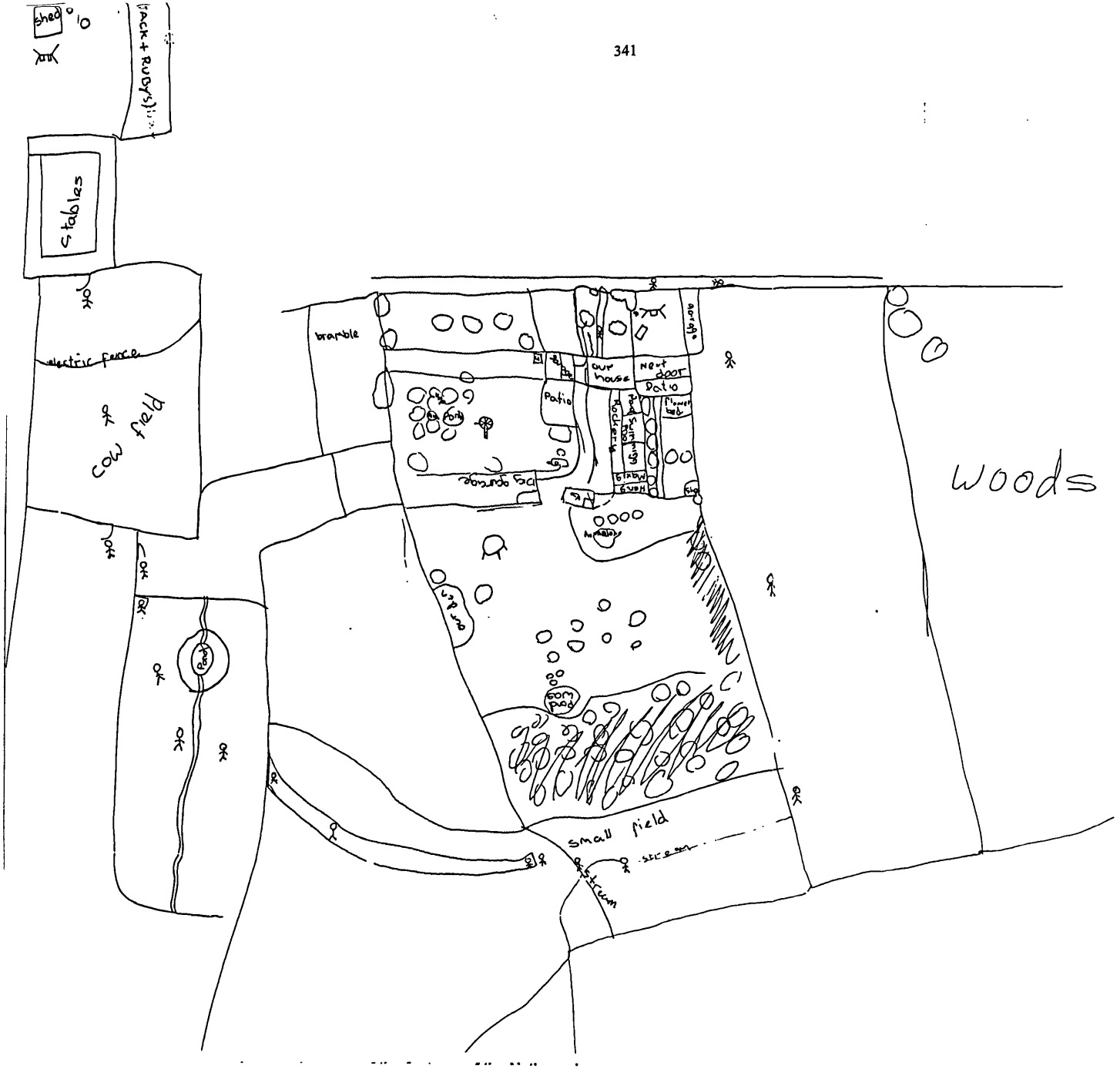


Fig 8.20 Heather Nutbrown's Map. This details many of the features of the Nutbrown's garden including their den, and area of trees and brambles. It also shows the walk over the fields between the Nutbrown's house and Jack and Ruby's house which both sets of children do on their own, and features such as the pond, stream and barns (stables) are shown.

example, Ruby emphasises a new set of stepping stones which we had just laid in our lawn; how cows feed around a large round hay rack in the field; and she is careful to give the neighbouring houses the right number of cars, and show that although viewed in plan that they have wheels. Ruby and Jack both show details of Manor Farm yard, such as their tree house, the piles of rubble, the old tree root, and the barns.

8.2.3 Interviews

The interviews took three main forms. Firstly, I interviewed younger children, in pairs, Jack and Ruby (siblings), Mary-Jane and Sally (friends), or as a group (the Nutbrown children). Secondly I interviewed four teenage children who had grown up in the village, on a one to one basis, (choosing again those I knew best and thought would be most at ease), and thirdly I gave the recording equipment to Sue and Wendy and asked them to interview each other. It was intended to do more of this type of interview but for various reasons, including concern for university equipment and time this was the only one carried out.

The interviews with the teenage children I think were relatively straight-forward, and can be judged and used with some caution, as interviews with adults. The interviews with younger children are much less straight forward to judge and use. Interviewing in pairs and groups was helpful, in that they began to work almost as mini-focus groups, and I felt the times when the interviews may be beginning to tap into the otherness of children was when the children got carried away telling collective stories. I also tried to use the interview location to the best advantage, interviewing the Nutbrown children while 'exploring' their garden, and Jack and Ruby while driving around the fields in an old car, (the old car is used for picking up firewood and build stone around Manor Farm and various children often come 'for the ride').

8.2.4 (Participant) Observation: (photographing children)

Throughout the period of writing this dissertation, our eldest child Sam has been increasingly, (due to increase in age), going outside, and playing with Jack and Ruby, Christopher, and more recently, other children who have moved in near by. Initially, as part of child care regimes, I, or other parents, would go and monitor the play of the younger children as they used the various places on Manor Farm yard,

sometimes with or alongside older children playing there. I also would sometimes be out In the barn doing some task, (cutting logs for example), as the children were using the barn, the space around it and the nearby tree house. This has given me a number of extended opportunities to watch these children, and particularly those in the middle years of childhood - Jack and Ruby, the often visiting Nutbrown children, Ben Huxter, and other variously regular visiting friends - as they play in these spaces. We also have had friends visiting our house, and parties, where the barn has again become a site of children's gathering and play. As well of this, I am outdoors quite a lot in the summer, (working on house and garden) and from here I can monitor the comings and goings of the children who visit Manor Farm yard, Beyond these intensive opportunities for observation, because of the mostly close connections between our and neighbouring families, particularly Jack and Ruby's and Christopher's, I do have an extensive impression of the patterns of, at least, sections of their everyday lives, for example; how often they go away for weekends, how often the children are away from the village for arranged activities, playing at friends' houses; and to what extent they are playing outside. I thus have exploited these positions to watch and consider these children within these environments. It is from this that much of the final section's speculations about children's worlds are drawn.

PHOTOGRAPHING CHILDREN

These sessions are also the point where I have mostly taken the photographs of children at play which appear later. This clearly is a sensitive issue from a number of perspectives, particularly in terms of the ethics of intrusion and power relations, and other forms of child exploitation which parents and the children themselves might be concerned over. These problems have been significantly lessened by the fact that I am doing the research in my home village, and in particular because the children I have watched and photographed most are those of families with which we have close and friendly relations. In Jack and Ruby's case we have all be on holiday together and I have photographed them playing with our eldest child Sam. From the parent's position and the children, in some senses at least, issues of exploitation and trust have not presented problems for the process of photographing the children. In terms of intrusion, the children when photographed, have been playing in essentially a shared space, and have been aware of my presence, a presence which is sometimes there for other purposes, along with that of other adults. They

seem aware to the degree that their activities are private in either a macro or micro sense, (either being watched closely, or in a more extensive, perhaps distant way), and I think, adjust their behaviour, if necessary, as they think fit. Often, they appeared to welcome the camera, and in some cases, encouraged it use and posed for it.

The photographs I think are significant part of the research process because they depict the intimacy between children, space and the material in a way which would be very difficult to describe. This is particularly so in the shifting variation of these relationships; the degree of unruly physicality of children; and the messy embodied nature of children's activities. (Adult life is often more discretely and neatly embodied, - either - eating, or playing, or sitting, or reading, or talking). What the photographs also lend is some notion of the scale-relations between children and the material world. It is very easy for adults to overlook how different the world is when you are small, this would be another aspect of childhood environment relations which would be difficult to deal with in a purely textual way. Although I do not make specific reference to this, it is an aspect which emerges in some of the photos. This is indicative of how photographs can transmit information which, to an extent, can by-pass the author in a way which is much more obvious than may occur in text.

As promised I will now briefly consider the approaches set out above, and the differing relationships and input they have with the material set out in the next section. A fundamental issue/problem revolves around the difference between children's material geographies, - where they go/don't go/can't go, what they do and so on - and their imaginative geographies which effectively reconstitute these material geographies in extremely unpredictable forms. Furthermore this process of imaginative reconstituting is highly fluid. Essentially this is about the difference between geographies of being, and geographies of becoming. Photographs and maps are mostly about the former, they are a symbolic record of material interaction, they can only hint at the complexity of child/place becoming. Interviews and participant observation perhaps have more potential in accessing these geographies of becoming, but will often remain mostly in the realm of the former. This is not necessarily a problem. Research such as Moore's (1994) of children's material interaction with landscapes, has a lot to

contribute in assessing the suitability of everyday landscapes for the needs of childhood, and also how to improve that suitability.

8.3 CHILDHOOD AND ENVIRONMENT

This section now considers (some) children's interactions with (some) outdoor spaces in Allswell. Such interactions are at the heart of notions of the country childhood idyll, and more generally of our constructions of childhood itself - or even the perceived crisis in childhood - yet they are also the location of the meanings and actions of the children themselves. The aim is to consider some characteristics of an environment, and of childhood, and the links between them, and how these are important from children's point of view. The exploration of these links can be useful in a number of ways but here I focus on two. Firstly, it is through such detailed examination of children-environment interactions that a better understanding is gained of what kinds of environment are conducive to childhood. Many progressive considerations of children's outdoor play spaces provision, or of child environment relations more generally, are built out of such observation. (For example see Moore, 1886; Hill and Michelson, 1981). Secondly, and perhaps more significant in this context, these observations and conceptualisations of positive links between children and the environments they use, may serve as conduits into the otherness of children's geographies.

With this in mind the material and ideas used to build the categories set out below combine empirical observation of children in Allswell, often on Manor Farm yard, which was the main point of participant observation, and also other work on children's interactions with the environment, which although is often not overtly concerned with the otherness of children, is in fact empathetic to such through the aim of enabling children in the constructions of their own (play) worlds, and also reshaping adult structuring of children's worlds so there is more compatibility between the two.

8.3.1 Variety: A Stimulating and Manipulatiable world

Variety in the environments which children use for play is now seen as critical for children's ability to be able construct their own worlds in ways which are satisfying to them. Moore (1986), in his study of children's use of, (and the potential improvement of), urban spaces for children, claims that 'access and *diversity*

emerge as the most important themes in childhood-environment policy' (p. 234, emphasis added).This variety should be seen in terms of - differing spaces, scales, surfaces, forms, materials, spectacles, and opportunities. Consequently such variety is both spatial and temporal, and often a complex linkage between the two, with spaces being various between themselves but also changing over time. The yard and barns at Manor Farm do provide quite a varied and varying environment. To detail this systematically would be a massive task, particularly as children have such a *fine grained* relationship with material space, but I will briefly review some aspects of it.

Firstly this area in fact consists of a number of mirco-spaces in terms of the children's use. Amongst these are:- the stand of conifers which is the site of the tree house, dens, and a climbing and exploring area; the ditch dividing this area off, which has to be bridged; the concrete apron around the barns which is good for cycle and foot races; the varying stack of bales in the dutch barn, used for climbing and den making; the big barn which provides a changing array of possibilities, ranging from two old cars (at one time), a site of dens set up as rival gang head quarters to the tree house, and a child created obstacle course. There are many other smaller scale spaces within and around these sites, and other fleeting opportunities/resources, some of which are considered under coming headings of 'loose material' and 'opportunism'. These variations are cross-cut by the seasonal transformations driven by the weather, daylight and farming practices. There is generally much more activity in the summer, but winter offers big puddles, mud, barns full of bales; and autumn offers, bonfires, blackberries and pears from an old pear tree. Throughout the year events such as sheep shearing, and even the loading of hay provide sudden spectacles which the children will engage with, (although these is an element of performing the idyll here in that parents will point out that such events are going on). Fig 8.21 provides an indicative selection of children activities in and around Manor Farm yard.

Watching groups of children playing in Manor Farm yard, it is striking that over a relatively short period of time they will switch from activity to activity, and from space to space, for example, firstly playing on the bales, then in the tree house, then building a den, then chasing around the barn. This variety will also be exploited on a longer time scale where different activities will fluctuate in popularity. For these

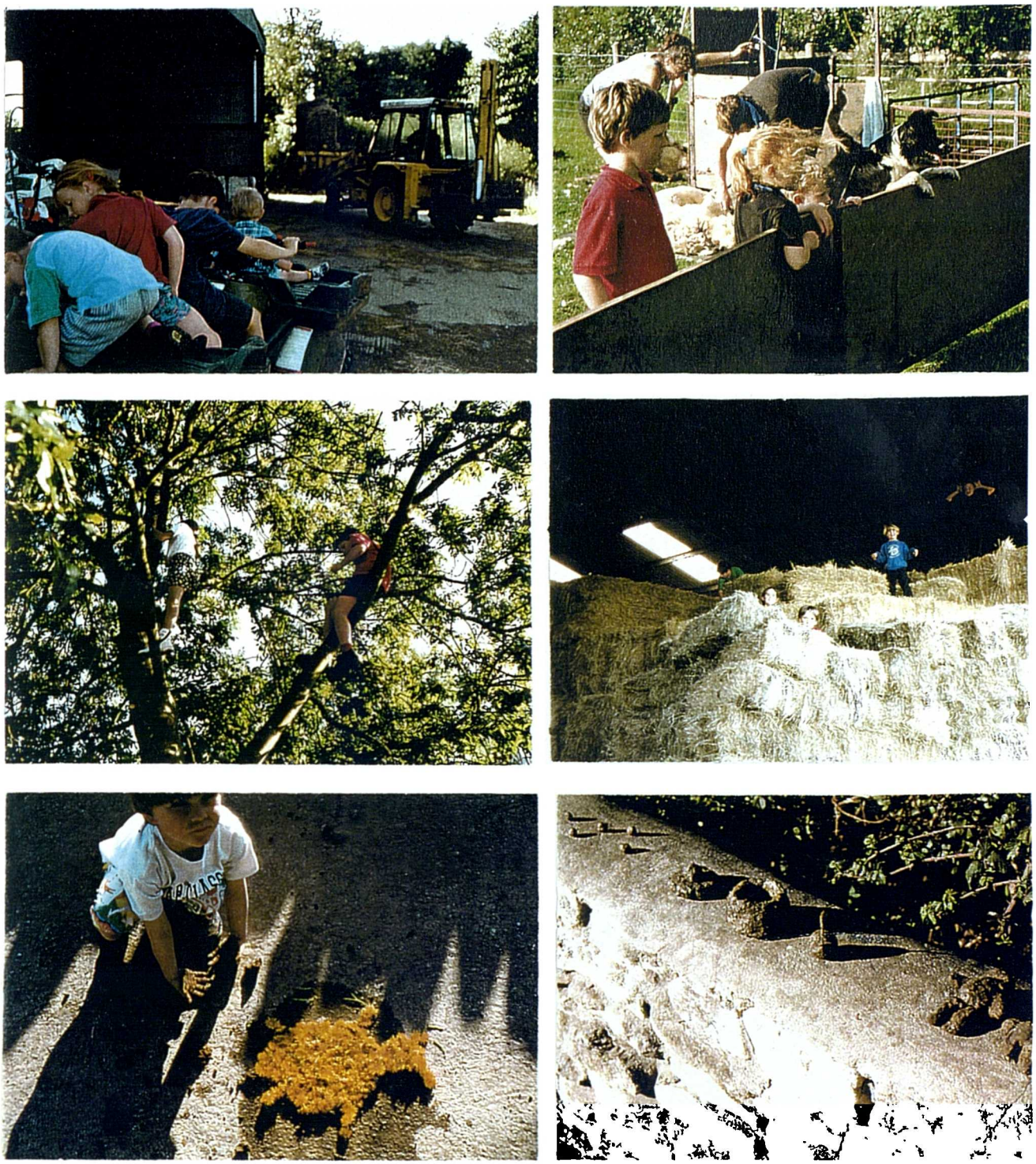


Fig 8.21 Examples of children's activities in and around Manor Farm yard. (Top left to bottom right). Playing on an ATV and watching hay being loaded; watching sheep shearing; climbing Ash tree (site 6); playing on bales in the big barn; a mud and flower picture on the road to the barn; other mud artefacts made by children.

Fig 8.21 cont. Examples of children's activities in and around Manor Farm yard. (Top left to bottom right). Younger children playing on the old tree root; older children abseiling off bales in the big barn; younger children climbing across the ditch between the yard and the tree house area; younger children playing in bales in the big barn; younger children in the tree house. Note; children's activities are often prompted by the materials they encounter. For example the abseiling was prompted by the presence of a ladder and stack of bales which happened to be under a place where a rope could be attached. The younger children's activity of climbing across the ditch was prompted by the presence of the long length of baler twine which they used as a rescue and climbing rope.

differing activities differing spaces and props are needed, and within these activities there is a deeply complex and intricate interplay between the material and the imaginative. Put simply, the more variation in space and material, which of course is accessible, the more scope children have for differing activities. Particularly important within all this is the availability of loose material.

LOOSE MATERIAL AND VEGETATION

Children do seem to want to make and manipulate objects (thus the success of Lego, other construction kit toys, and the ubiquitous sand pit), material events (a form of prosaic chemistry), and, as far as is possible the environments in terms of remodelled spaces. As Sobel (1990) points out, (retrieving themes from the influential work of Edith Hobbs)

> it is crucial for children to participate in world-making or world shaping activities. Children need the opportunity to create and manipulate....The creation of these worlds from plastic materials.... gives children the opportunity to organise a world and then find places within it in to become themselves (p. 8).

This can often create a tension with adult constructions of what a space should represent. Jacobs and Jacobs (1980) 'found that adults tend to emphasise the benefit of safe, secure neighbourhood playgrounds whereas the key to children's satisfaction lay within them being given the opportunity to design and modify their own environments' (cited by Aitken 1994, p. 131).

Key to these activities is the presence of loose material in the environment which is both safe(ish), and not restricted from use due to adult needs or curfews. Some rural/country spaces quite clearly can offer sticks, stones, mud, grass, and other vegetation as loose material. As already quoted in Chapter 2 Shoard itemises some of these and how children may use them. Within such analyses vegetation is seen as a key element. Moore (1989) for example, presents evidence 'to the extent to which imaginative play and creative social integration can be supported by a highly manipulative environment having plants as its primary play material' (p. 3). In Allswell, the children do interact with various vegetation; tree climbing is an example already given; sticks are a common currency; and in the autumn 'wild harvests' are exploited. Perhaps the most obvious and traditional of these are conker collecting, and blackberrying. In addition to this, domestic harvests also become a resource with children cropping fruit trees and as fig 8.22 shows children 'raiding' for soft fruit

Fig 8.22 'Raiding' for soft fruit at Manor Farm vegetable patch.

in a vegetable patch on Manor Farm. (This is tolerated because the crop usually exceeded requirements).To these more 'natural resources' in such settings as Manor Farm yard, can be added a whole range of material such as string, wire, timber, tyres, various iron mongery, bits of tractors, and gravel/rubble, which are 'lying around'. Jack and Ruby's tree house has been built out of such resources. Fig 8.23 shows two configurations of ground level dens made out bits of timber retrieved from the barn, and also an underground shelter, the roof of which is also constructed from such materials. In contrast to this, envisage some well regulated urban environments, such as a street, estate or even urban park; these are areas where loose material does not so readily feature, and where it does it can be seen as a problem to be tidied away, and most vegetation will be managed and 'out of bounds' in resource terms. The adventure playground movement was, in effect, an attempt to recreate some of these characteristics of manipulability and variety within spaces for urban children precisely because of the perceived lack of such resources in these areas. Other spaces in or near Allswell, apart from Manor Farm yard can be seen as providing both variable and manipulatiable space. Fig 8.24 for example shows, children collecting conkers in the Churchyard and Fig 8.25 shows the sledding field. The stream and the woods (site 11), are places where children

Fig 8. 23 Den constructions showing use of gathered material.

Fig 8. 24 Children gathering conkers in the church yard.

Fig 8.25 Sledding on Manor Farm.

can go themselves and find opportunity for manipulability. I was told by Mary-Jane Greyson 'there a track all the way through - (the woods), there's lots of places where you can make camps and stuff, and you can easily get on the stream. (ci 6.1). All these spaces do seem to offer characteristics which the children want to exploit. And significantly, because the *village* is seen as a pure space (this is considered in the next chapter), and through processes of encouraging the performance of the idyll, and gate keepering, they *are* spaces which *some* children have access to. Taken together, the spaces of the village form an integrated complex which adds a further layer of variety and potential. But the children's access to this 'whole' is always partial, and varies from considerable freedom to virtual exclusion, and this variation in turn is determined by a complex cross cutting of age, gender, and domestic (particularly sibling patterns), and geographical micro-locations and parental attitudes.

Clearly there are many types of spaces in urban and other settings which offer spectacle and variation, perhaps on a much greater scale than these rural spaces, although I have argued that loose material *might* be a more problematic resource for urban children. But the significance of a place like Allswell is that the resources which are potentially there for children to use may be more easily or extensively exploited because of the complex adult constructions of childhood in this place as being about freedom, innocence, being outdoors, safety and closeness to nature. Places of loose material in urban areas, might well be seen as dangerous, polluted areas where some children, particularly those of a similar class background to those in Allswell, might not be allowed to go by concerned parents.

8.3.2 Children as Opportunists

The other side of this coin of varying environments is that many children do appear to be good opportunists, especially when in groups, and therefore efficient and rapid exploiters of such variations. Mary-Jane told me 'in the winter going down to the stream and stuff is more fun, because there is more water, and like you go down in your wellies and you wade all the way down, everyone enjoys that' (ci 6.1). This and many other examples can be seen as the opportunist use of a varying resources. One key implication of this is that children's uses of (changing) spaces will always go beyond what adults can imagine or expect, or design for. For example in Chapter 2 I argued that the increasing automation and scale of agricultural production meant that there were less opportunities for children to

become involved in, or to usurp such processes to their own ends, and that a good example of this is was the switching to baling straw and hay in big rather than the traditional size bales. Not only are these new bales not moveable by a child, or adult, manually, but the stacks they make in barns are not (apparently) so conducive to children's play. I have already recounted how the dutch barn at Manor Farm became, for one summer, an evening play venue for a number of children in the village. This was on stacks of traditional sized bales which were mostly, stable, climbable and presented tiers of levels areas on which to chase, climb and jump between. Big bales appear to offer much less opportunity in these ways. But this last year (1996) the big barn at Manor Farm was cleared of its customary clutter described earlier, and was stacked full with mostly big bales, and some small bales. When these were being brought in off the fields, and wagons of bales where parked in the barn, I found Ruby, Sam, and two of the Nutbrown children, playing amongst these big bales. They were exploiting a very fleeting opportunity, in that the load they were playing in would be unloaded the next day, and the state of the stack in the barn which they were using would have changed. They had found a way of playing 'with' the big bales which confounded my earlier assumption that they were child unfriendly, and demonstrated these children's ability to very quickly spot new opportunities for play. The bales were stacked on the wagon, but due to their size and slightly distorted shape, they did not fit together closely and made what was, in effect, tunnels in between them. The children, as fig 8.26 shows, were disappearing through a small hole at the back of the load, and then appearing again either at the front or the side. In the latter case, they made a landing pad of loose hay for jumping onto. Similarly the bales already stacked in the barn had gaps in between which the children used in further games. Again it needs to be said that children in urban settings are similarly opportunistic in exploitation urban environments (Moore 1986) but in parallel with point above about the exploitation of space, it is the positive images of children in the countryside being free and innocent which makes this opportunism much less likely to come into conflict with adult curfews and opprobrium. I also must stress that the above example is one of many, which form an on-going sequence of varied activity within these spaces. One parent perhaps summed up the significance of children's ability to exploit varied material circumstances saying 'give a child freedom and (he/she) will find a place to play' (18.12).

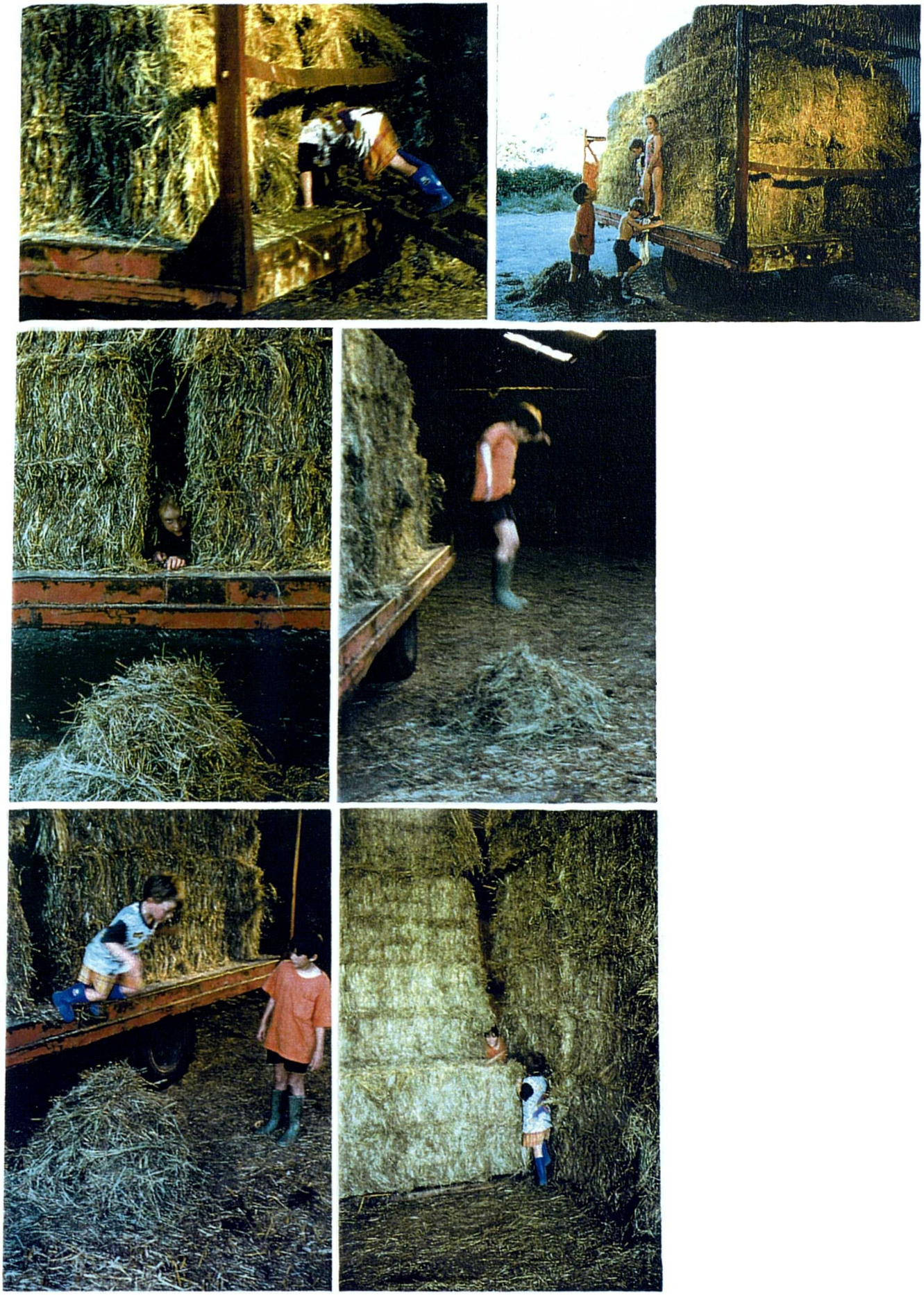


Fig 8.26 Playing around and between the big bales at Manor Farm barn.

8.3.3 Space: Separate/Private

The spatial/temporal separation of adult and child spaces is a prominent feature of both fictional accounts of childhood and professional/academic concerns for childhood. Such constructions are summed by Dovey (1990) who explores the theme of 'the need of children to escape the strictures of the adult world to places of refuge and peace, places to dream' (p.13).[1] In Allswell such ideas are confirmed by the children themselves. Mary-Jane and Sally told me told how the den site was most important to them as a private space away from their respective houses - 'somewhere you can go and sit and talk away from everyone else...everyone's in the house, it's really cramped, so you go to the den' (ci 6.1). Seven of the ten children's maps have dens marked upon them. These and other separate spaces are sustainable because of their non-use by adults. The small stand of conifers in which Jack and Ruby have their tree house, make dens, and do other activities, lies between a ditch and the boundary fence of Manor Farm yard. This does have an adult function in that, the trees were planted to screen the modern industrial agricultural infrastructure of Manor Farm from the Hall, and the ditch drains part of the farm. But these functions are not effected by the children's activities, and do not necessitate adult use or even entrance to the space so it becomes separated from (frequently used or constantly regulated) adult space. As the sites commented upon in Chapter 6 show there are other such spaces in and around Allswell. It is these spaces which are available to children which are important in allowing them to create their own geographies within the fabric of generally dominant adult geographies. In other localities Ward (1990) and Shoard's (1980) fears of such places being 'tided' away may be more justified, and if this is so, this eradication of separate spaces will be critical for childhood. The issue really is about the nature and intensity of adult ordering of space. If adult ordering and use is patchy in extensive/intensive terms then not only will pockets of de facto children's spaces appear, but also the children will to an extent use the spaces around these pockets also in the form of shared space. On Manor Farm the adult use is extensive rather than intensive, thus as well as the separate space of the tree house site there is

[1] Dovey's work is yet another example of research into children's worlds via adult recollections, but he does acknowledge the potential distortion through processes of memory, but argues that such processes might filter out the mundane and leave only the strongest emotional experiences, and also that given difficulties of researching with children into theses types of experiences this may be the best method (p. 13).

also the shared spaces of the barn and the yard more generally. This is critical for two reasons. Firstly the shared spaces around the small site of separate space which children can find and claim for themselves is the means of unsupervised access to these separate spaces. Secondly the greater the area of shared spaces the greater the variety children may have as a resource. If separate spaces are confined to a few sites, or if, as in other areas, children's spaces become officially set aside and designed play areas, and the surrounding spaces are for some reason 'no go areas' then the variety they can access and their freedom is profoundly curtailed. If adult use of space becomes intensive, and particularly if that intensity is accompanied by a singularity, - such as a road, or a well manicured lawn, or a intensive agricultural production unit - children's use of it will diminish. There is also a temporal axis to consider in that some spaces will vary between being intensively used, and extensively used, thus leaving windows of opportunity for children. (As in the harvested fields considered in Chapter 2). In other words intensive articulation of adult geographies will eradicate the potential for children's geography, by the closing off of both separate space and shared space to children.

In Allswell, and perhaps in some other rural spaces, pockets of less intensive adult geographies still exist. In fact this may well be so in all areas. But urban and suburban areas do seem to be generally more intensive both materially and symbolically. By materially more intensive I mean that the micro-scales of land use are more defined and materially developed. Clearly there are areas which will be exceptions to this, and some of these for example the 'unofficial' green spaces found in most cities, but the pressure these come under is reflected by ongoing concern and campaigning over their development. Other extensively used spaces will be associated with the break down of 'order' and may be seen as places unsuitable for children or as places of unsuitable children, as considered in Chapter 4. The critical point is that in Allswell, and perhaps other rural spaces, there is a coming together of material, economic, symbolic, and adult constructions of space and childhood which form conditions which may leave space for (some) children to make their own geographies, to at least some degree. At the heart of this are constructions of the countryside as an idyll for childhood. This complex construction of space - both in general, as in ideas of 'the countryside', and also in the specific articulations contained in particular places - clearly is shifting and evolving and now represents a considerably different condition to past spaces. From a position of

being 'within' and in a state of 'becoming' such spaces the children take and make what they can. Critically their position of relative inexperience in terms of comparative structuring means that they construct their life worlds in utterly differing matrices of understandings.

8.4 TRANSGRESSIONS AND CONFLICT

Above I have set out what can be seen as a certain degree of harmony or perhaps possibilities of co-existence between (some) adult geographies and (some) children's geographies in (parts) of Allswell. This can be seen as complexly inter-connected with notions of country childhood idylls, being, in parts both constructions and reconstructions of such. But this is not the complete story. There is also evidence of children's geographies transgressing the symbolic and physical structures of adult geography, even within these apparently contiguous spaces, and this reflects that the geographies constructed for childhood by adults in these circumstances are only *similar* and *partial* (rather than congruent and complete) to the geographies children want to construct for themselves and their efforts to do so. Where these geographies do not match there will be sites of conflict and/or transgression.

8.4.1 Transgressions

It seems quite clear to me that the children from a very early age develop an awareness that they are living within adult geographies, and that these range through the material geographies of spatial division and demarcation, and also the symbolic geographies which overlay them. 'Growing up' can be seen partly as an effect of the consequence of the recognitions of adult geography through the processes of, and the consequences of, transgression. Transgression here is taken to be the crossing of boundaries, not through a deliberate act (this is termed conflict), but rather due to a failure of recognition of the boundary. Children are aware of being policed by adult authority, even at the stage of a crawling baby crying when he/she is picked up and restrained from entering some or other space/activity, but they have little idea why this is so. Such processes of transgression and correction are profound and complete in the lives of young children, in that they have little grasp of the boundaries and disciplines of the environment they find themselves in, (i.e. what a table is for, what a toilet is for). Such processes continue as children get older and also in the outdoor environment.

Young children will not, for example, appreciate the implications of what a road is. As children get older understanding of these restrictions fill out, but transgressions still remain either through areas of non-understanding, or transform into conflict through non -acceptance of adult geography even though its boundaries are understood.

In trying to construct children's geographies and their relation with the (adult) structures they operate in, these transgressions and conflicts are not only key issues for the children, but might also might be in some ways points of 'visible' turbulence which can give indications of the underlying children's geographies. Within the awareness children have of the constrictions they live under, and the constrictions they may not so easily recognise, it seems clear that they try to operate to their own desires, and to differing degrees, subvert this policing though transgression and conflict which will range from the overt to covert and also from the mild to more extreme. It is conceivable that such (attempts at) assertion will generally increase with the age of the child. These are areas of children's lives which bridges from the realm of the mutual to the realm of the secret, the latter being a realm of significance for the consideration of the otherness of children, and also their constructions of their own lives. Occasional glimpses of varying 'depth' into these occurred within the research, but for the most part they remained closed off, for children also police this boarder territory which lies between adulthood and childhood, not least in the interviews.

As children get older some of them start to push the spatial and cultural boundaries and rules. (Some examples and parental views of this was given in section 7.1.3). Another example of this is the Hall grounds and its surrounding boundary. The tree house site on Manor Farm yard lies along side the Hall boundary fence, which is quite substantial, but climbable due to trees on either side of it. Various children have begun to at first 'look over' and then make small incursions into the Hall grounds. As far as I am aware there is no history, or 'air' of hostility emanating from the Hall, but in the eyes of most parents, the children should not intrude. On one occasion I happened across Jack and Ben (fn 13) jumping over a low wall out of another part of the Hall grounds, and they told me they were taking a short-cut from Ben's to Jack's house, and in their explanation was a clear tone of excitement and challenge. The children, collectively, do seem to have a penchant for short cuts

and private/secret routes. Jane whose garden is surrounded by the Hall's grounds has told me that her eldest daughter had just made the first explorations beyond their garden and that this might be the beginnings of the development of a short cut to other houses in the village. There are elements of adult complicity in this in that such transgressions are seen as part of childhood and particularly country childhood, where the transgressions such as 'apple scrumping' shows signs of adventure and an independence of spirit. Importantly these adult approved transgressions always need to stay within the realm of innocence, some transgression do not.

8.4.2 Conflict

There are also more straight forward conflicts between adult and childhood over uses of space. An example of this is the shooting which takes place on Manor Farm. The parents of the Nutbrown children told how their children, and the children who live next door to them, have protested at the shooting of pheasants which occurs on the land adjacent to their gardens

> The major conflict came in our first confrontation with the shooting was when a pheasant came plummeting down into our woods about 10 feet away from where we were walking. The kids were playing in the woods. Last winter we rearranged the points at which the shooting took place and didn't have nearly so many problems. The children don't like it they can't understand why people buy baby birds, feed them then shoot them... they did do posters to put up in the bedroom windows... *(was that their idea?)* Yes, totally their idea. Whenever the shooting was happening in winter next door's children went out screaming, "don't shoot animals and don't shoot birds" (18.7).

Much conflict comes in the everyday form of children wanting to go where their parents are not willing to let them, and/or do what they are not allowed to do. I have already described a few instances of 'trouble' with children in the village which emerged in the interviews with adults in chapter 7. But stories of children being in covert conflict with parents did emerge from the children themselves. In two instances in the interviews it did became clear that children were going to places which their parents were not aware and/or did not approve of. But these were revealed because in the one case the transgression was seen as 'trivial' and therefore safe to 'confess' to, and in the other, the discussion of third parties and the role anonymity made the information safe. When I was interviewing Ted and Margaret Fields, at one point their daughter (Sue) sat in and listened, and I asked the parents if they thought their children and/or their friends went beyond the gardens of the houses opposite theirs and into the fields. Both replied that they did

not think so, but Sue intervened and said that she and Wendy, her friend who lived across the road, did get out of Wendy's garden, walk along the edge of the field and then 'spy' on the activities of nearby houses with other children in them. In another of the interviews with children, when I was asking about the summer gathering which took place in the barn at Manor Farm, I was told that two children had joined in but was then told 'but don't tell anyone' because this had been kept from the parents in question.

So far I have considered children's geographies where they overlap and interrelate with adult geographies in quite obvious ways, either by being in some form of harmony or disharmony, with the adult geographies of the village. In the final section of this chapter I want to address issues concerning the otherness of children in terms of their own constructions of these and other issues.

8.5 OTHERNESS: GEOGRAPHIES OF THE MAGIC, BIZARRE AND IRRATIONAL

Children live in different worlds, and basically the younger the child the more different the world is. It is easy to forget the achievements of adulthood and the extent to which these structure our world. Infants have (initially) no experience, or even (adult) language - the very force which according to structuralist and post structuralist theories - constructs meanings and even subjectivities. Once language begins to be acquired, there are still many basic sense making systems which younger children remain outside of. Imagine a world where one cannot count, read, understand the time or date systems, or the macro-geographies of nation and globe, and the (adult) significance of money, sex and death. Their lack of 'coherent' knowledge of these often burdensome elements of adult life, are amongst the key reasons children are seen as innocent, and why they are invested in with vicarious adult nostalgic yearning. But to suppose their lives empty because they do not contain these knowledges would be wrong, and this is such an obvious point that this rarely is the case. But much more prevalent is the tendency to consider the substance of children's lives to be trivial, quaint or even cute. There is a small industry of taking children's constructions of parts of their the world, for example the television show *'Child's Talk'* and the Nannett Newman books *God Bless Love* (1972); *All Our Love* (1978), which do seek out children's views but then commodify

these in terms of quaintness, cuteness, funniness, and even naive wisdom. In other words the meanings of these statements by children are reinterpreted through, and for, adult means and ends. The meanings that they had for the children remain the concealed other.

Children's wishes, needs, and claims, are usually made subordinate to the 'much more serious' substance of adult life, but children live in fully fledged worlds, the meanings of which are serious to them, even if those meaning to adults are trivial, and also appear bizarre and irrational. Perhaps here is the nub of the issue of children's geographies, for it is these worlds which are, firstly, hard to access, and secondly and more significantly, almost impossible to interpret and reconstruct even if they have been (partially) accessed.

Within the interviews there were some instances of such 'marketable', 'cute' child logic, such as a discussion between Jack and Ruby about sheep's birthdays and the injustice of having a shorter life span and thus a smaller overall number of birthdays (ci.1). Beyond reporting that such thoughts occurred to these children as we moved through a field of sheep, and that such thoughts represented the utterly different imaginative geography of that space which children and adults might construct, it is difficult to see where to go beyond that. This is the crucial difference between being and becoming. In the former adult mode of existing, meanings are *relatively* (I stress relatively), fixed and coherent. It is therefore possible to an extent which may be useful to reconstruct these (academically) and work with them to some end. But in a child's world that is becoming, meanings will be extremely fluid, they have not been anchored by experience, and thus to reconstruct them and work with them is much less straight-forward. But this distinction between being and becoming must not be overdrawn for children's words will have relatively fixed meanings within them also.

Children's worlds have their own moral codes, stresses, and conflicts, and levels of seriousness. As Aitken (1994) reports, adult tendencies to see play as being essentially trivial and light hearted is questionable. In my interview with the Nutbrown children they told me that the 'forfeit' for a misdeed in their 'gang' was to touch the electric fence which runs through some of the fields next to Manor Farm yard and that Ruby had recently incurred this forfeit for 'being scared of a cow'. In

sessions of observation when I have watched (mostly) the Nutbrown children, Jack and Ruby and various others playing, I realise that I am witnessing the (adult) country childhood idyll, but for the children it is not necessarily idyllic. In the practice of playing together the children go though a whole range of emotions - including jealousy, anger, fear, - which are common to survival in group situations. There are all the stresses of being excluded, or left behind, both literally or in skills terms. Given the differing ages, gender, sibling relation, and the general and specific disposition of the varying groups of children, these stresses are complex and shifting within the varying groups. For example when I followed the 'Manor Farm Gang' up to the valley when they went to build a raft on the 'river', I became involved with, and thus close to, one of the children's anxiety over a matter which could not have been anticipated. Claire had found some complete clay pigeons which she wanted to take home, but working out how to carry them on her bike was holding her up and the others were heading off on their bikes. She appealed to me for help, and as we tried to work out a solution, I could see she was beginning to cry, and was extremely agitated by being left behind, but equally determined to take the clays home with her. On another occasion these and other children were playing in the barn when it was discovered that there was a dead sheep in the horse box, ready for removal. This was the object of some fascination, and one of the gang who was not playing, and did not know of the sheep, was lured into the trailer on some pretence or other through the small side door which was then shut. The victim was very upset, perhaps more at being the victim than being momentarily confined with a dead sheep. On all the occasions I watched the children playing together such stresses and conflict were apparent, (another example was when the bridge to the tree house was booby trapped because of a dispute between two of the older children, but it was one of the younger ones who feel through into the ditch, and at that point adult intervention read 'the riot act' to the children and consoled the victim). As well as such stress and conflict, the children's games on occasions consisted of very violent make believe which belies the notion of innocence put on children generally and children in the country idylls.

The whole conceptualisation of play may need examining in terms of adult constructions of childhood. Play is an extremely complex word, bearing meanings of, amongst others, performance (musical); imaginative performance (drama), physical (sport) and mental (games) 'diversions', and of course is central to what

childhood is and what children do. Play *is* seen as important to progressive constructions of childhood and even as a children's right, but it is also seen as somehow ephemeral, even trivial in its actual form and is thus used in the adult sense of 'diversion' from the serious substances of living. Children although they do use the word play, are not playing in this sense, they are merely conducting their lives. Intriguingly play also means - 'freedom and room for movement; the space in or through which anything can or does move'; 'free or unimpeded movement'; and 'action, activity, operation, working; often implying the ideas of rapid change, variety, etc.' (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, Vol. 2 p. 1603) - It is perhaps these meanings which come closer to defining children's play, or play needs.

To conclude this chapter I firstly have to confess that it has caused me the most anxiety throughout this whole project, both from the early days of trying to design research methodologies, and through the research process and 'writing up' stage. I did consider dropping it entirely and setting up the dissertation as a attempt to see how 'rural children's worlds were structured from without' by prevailing adult constructions of the countryside as being a childhood idyll - a reasonable aim in the context of Philo's (1992) paper, but only taking up half of his proposition. In the end it was felt that I should persist with this chapter although it does seem rather out of balance with the rest of the dissertation, in terms of the attention paid to the two sides of the 'experienced from within and structured from without' conceptualisation. Given the recent re-orientation of much work considering children and childhood within geography and beyond, exploring children's worlds from within is going to be an ongoing theme in many academic, and professional disciplines, and much basic work needs to be done on barely formed areas of theoretical relevance. Thus I feel perhaps it was over ambitious in research terms to try and produce a dissertation which covered both adult constructions and children's constructions in the detail and depth which is required and which in fact is meaningful.

I feel that my unique position of living in the case study village and having children myself has given me the chance to make up for these problems to some extent. I feel I have developed some interesting and potentially useful propositions about childhoods which are embedded in the circumstances of a particular place, and what I feel are the most significant are now developed in the conclusion, but I do not

feel I have managed to penetrate or reconstruct children's world beyond a few fragmentary glimpses. I hope this will be the subject of further work, by me and of course others.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS: EMERGING THEMES AND CONCEPTUALISATIONS

This final chapter now attempts to set out the main themes which have emerged from this work and to address them in more abstracted conceptual terms and to tie these in with relevant themes within human geography and other literatures. These themes are divided into two sections which reflect the original conceptualisation, namely - how children's worlds are structured from without and experienced from within. Thus the first section attempts to develop what appear to be key themes which emerge out of the work on adult constructions of rural childhood, and to consider these in terms of the structuring of children's lives within Allswell, and the rural more generally. In the second section, the theme of order and disorder and how this may relate to children's geographies is revisited. Initially though, there is a need to acknowledge issues of class and location as they have emerged through the work.

It is vital to realise that Allswell is now predominately, (if not quite exclusively) a middle class community, this clearly has a fundamental structuring forces on the children's of the village lives. Not only are there the mores parents hold concerning parenting and schooling to be considered, but also the economic, social and cultural resources which these parents, and their children have at their disposal. How the notion and practice of the country childhood idyll combines with this is critical, and I argue in section 9.1.4 that it has become a component, a resource, within the more wider ranging circumstances of the children's lives. Clearly the rural cannot be assumed to be exclusively a middle class territory, (although Hoggart, 1997 feels the need to ask 'whether the English countryside has been "captured by the service classes"' , p. 253). The circumstances of other rural children in other locations will be substantially different in some ways from those in Allswell. Villages which are cut through by a major road will be different to Allswell, as would a village of a more mixed class make up. But I suggest that the dominating nature of notions of the countryside being a childhood idyll will have a structuring force on the lives of other rural children in other areas, and that how that interacts with other specific conditions of other rural places will be critical. Equally it cannot be assumed that the urban is a homogenous space in terms of class. In chapter 4 the focus of the view

of the urban as a childhood distopia inevitably falls on areas of considerable social deprivation, and the many differing, often wealthy, again middle class, perhaps leafy, areas of the urban, cannot be seen in the same way. But my argument made in Chapter 4 was that often, views of the urban as childhood distopia did not take particular care to make this point, and thus the urban began to be treated a homogenised space, and also the proximity of differing social/childhood spaces in the urban had particular consequences in terms of fear of the contamination of some areas by others, and the mixing which is often seen as unavoidable in urban areas. This is particularly significant in terms of the rural idyll as being seen as a (relative to urban) pure space, and this is a major point considered below.

9.1 ALLSWELL AS A SPACE OF CHILDHOOD: PURE SPACE, FREEDOM AND CONTROL, PERMEABILITY OF BOUNDARIES AND MIDDLE-CLASSNESS

From the hopefully rich, but certainly messy, melange of the textual, empirical, personal and academic material which I have covered in the period of research, *some* of which is set out in the preceding chapters, a number of themes have emerged which seem to be potentially useful ways of considering how children's lives are structured within Allswell, and more generally. These I want to consider under the following terms; pure space; freedom and control; permeability of boundaries; and lastly, middleclassness. All these are in fact interconnected to differing extents, and thus in some ways difficult to address when unnaturally divided from one from another, but it is hoped that the approach used will be effective in getting some of their significance across.

9.1.1 Allswell as a Pure Space

Here I want to suggest that Allswell is constructed as a *relatively* pure space by most of its adult inhabitants and that this has key consequences in how children's lives are structured. Taking the notion of pure space from the work of Sibley (1988, 1995), I want to show how the construction of Allswell as a pure space by some parents/guardians and other adults means that they are prepared to give children a certain degree of freedom within that pure space, and the construction of that freedom is tied up with the construction of the innocence of the children and of the space.

Allswell is seen as a pure space in that it conforms quite highly, given its spatial/temporal situation, with popular and traditional images of the rural idyll. This is, as set out in Chapter 6,- a reconstructed, adapted and partial version of the rural idyll, but it remains workable, given the degree of likemindedness and homogeneity, and the lack of anything which would depurify this state to a *critical or terminal degree*. Such impure otherness could come in all manner of forms, for example - social group, individual behaviour, land use/development. Although there are a whole range of elements which taint the image of Allswell as a pure space, some of which I have touched upon, for example traffic and fear, these are still either seen as relatively minor issues, especially on adult terms, or seen as being not as bad as in other places.

The notion of pure space used here is taken from the work of Sibley (1988, 1995), but some initial reference needs to be made to Mary Douglas's (1966) *Purity and Danger* from which Sibley's analysis directly draws. In this key text, Douglas makes the claim that 'dirt is essentially disorder' (p. 2), in that no material is inherently dirt, but rather dirt is a matter of matter being out of place. The processes with which societies deal with dirt, 'separating, tidying and purifying' (ibid) should not be seen a 'negative movements' but rather 'a creative movement' through which 'we are ... positively re-ordering our environment' (ibid). Douglas also suggests that such processes are as meaningful in modern societies as they are in the 'primitive culture' in which much of her analysis is located. The processes with which Douglas is concerned have implications for the internal ordering of societies and also for the construction and maintenance of the society itself, as purity is pursed through ordering, exclusions and expulsions. Danger, the threat of the consequences of failing to achieve such goals, not only is the incentive for the pursuit of purity, but also a means of ideological manipulation, wherein control of the constructions of danger results in the control of the structures of order. Clearly the issues raised in Dougalas's analysis of order and boundaries have strong resonances with some aspects of geography, particularly when they are so clearly evident not only in symbolic form but also in material and spatial form.

Sibley points out that in spaces 'where there is mixing....(of social group and diverse activities in space)' , there is a 'threat of contamination and a challenge to

hegemonic values' (1995, p. 39), and that mixed spaces may well be considered to be seen as morally inferior to pure spaces as a consequence. It is critical to note that spaces, and the places which may be approximate to them, which are subject to a high degree of 'mixing' are constantly having to cope with intrusions to any established order and therefore purity which might be established there. This may be an emergent condition of the 'modern' world, where as we are often told, (for example), that 'everywhere seems to become "a melting-pot"', as a consequence of 'the era of globalization, of worldwide communications, of time-space compression and convergence, and of major flows of international migration' (Massey, 1995, p. 46). Such processes may be most obvious in certain areas, and less obvious in others. Some places may still be able to cling on to, or reconstruct, some form of recognisable internal order, and even symbolic and/or spatial coherence, and rural places which might be considered as idyllic I suggest are such.

Pure spaces, pure identities, and even pure bodies are created by first the identification of impure 'otherness' and then the exclusion of such. The can be achieved either by the dividing off of impure otherness by the creation of boundaries, or/and the ejection of impurity into the outside 'residual spaces' (Sibley, 1995, p. 69). Sibley uses Sennett's work which conceptualises suburbs as pure spaces to critically explore these issues, but it would appear that the rural (idyll) as pure, and the urban, or even 'defiled' rural (non idylls) - as impure mixed spaces could be seen as seminal examples of such constructions of symbolic/material spaces. Within the context of treating the rural - or this case study example of the rural - as a pure space, I feel some insights can be made about notions of purity and the rural, purity and children, and the two coming together in 'country childhoods'. Firstly I want to consider how Allswell might be considered pure in the context of the flows and thus the mixings which it now consists of. Secondly, I want to consider just what is seen as out of place and therefore impure within Allswell.

Pure spaces are often considered in terms of relatively closed and/or cohesive communities such as tribal societies, or even American suburbs, (Perin, 1988) - and the thrust of these studies considered issues of boundary building, internal ordering, exclusion, and the identification of the pure by demarking, and excluding the impure with the consequences that spatial boundaries can also become symbolic and moral boundaries. Sibley's work admirably challenges the

consequences of exclusions for those within and without, which he says , 'are real enough. Distancing and a narrow range of encounters contribute to stereotyping of 'others' and deviants are expelled or refused entry' (1988, p. 418). But as I have already considered Allswell as a 'community' is constituted by individuals and families who have extensive social patterns beyond the village. The consequence of this is that any image of the village as a closed community, facing the outside world, and defining itself as such, is fragmented, in that most residents are both inside and outside the community. Many through their 'out of village' life, often in the cities of Bristol or Bath, and in the professions they are in, particularly (in terms of being parents) those teaching in urban educational establishments, are *not* 'distanced from, and only exposed to a narrow range of encounters'. In fact the reverse may be true, and the pure material space of the village becomes also a symbolic life space, where the journey home marks the moving from one life space to another. Within this movement across the spatial boundary into the space, complex processes of inclusion, exclusion and separation occur. For many villagers many aspects of outside life are not necessarily negative, so the construction of purity is not simply a case of excluding the profane 'outside' in general, but rather certain elements of the outside.

The size, location, constitution (few public facilities, established 'responsible' landowners), protective planning restrictions, and house prices, means that a serious influx of 'depurifying elements', of whatever kind, has little chance, or even desire (in some cases) of gaining a significant foothold. This is not to say that the village would not treat any form of 'contamination' with concerted hostility, but it is mostly in the comfortable position of not having to face such problems, thus its construction of a pure space is more one of demarcation, rather than actual active exclusion. In effect the house prices play a large part in this, but of course house prices are a consequence of market forces rather than any form of orchestrated village defence strategy. Once demarcation is established, processes of surveillance will attempt to identify and prevent depurifying elements entering the village, the neighbourhood watch scheme could be seen in this way but it may also be seen in other minor forms such as a concern about unsuitable building finishes.

Sibley (1995) suggests it is instructive to see what form of purity defines a 'moral space' and what is kept, if possible, outside that space. In the case of Allswell, (and

I would venture, other relatively 'pure' rural settings), where there is already a form of de facto demarcation of purity, a slightly different approach is required. The characteristics of purity can be identified by looking at small elements which apparently jar within the order of space. In the case of Allswell I suggest that the order is of organic/traditional/rustic nature. This puts a particular slant on Sibley's analysis which centres around pollution - what it is that is unclean and to be excluded both in individual and group terms and through which the self or group purifies and constructs itself. It is insightful to see in Allswell what is considered 'clean' and 'unclean'. For example; in Chapter 7 I have quoted parents as saying how honest country dirt is 'good' for kids; and on Manor farm yard, there is a large and seemingly ever-growing - until it is cleared by tractor and begun again - pile of cow and horse manure which is mixed with bedding straw and is at various stages of decomposition. This, although it is no more that a (vigorous) stone's throw from four houses, is not seen as a problem, but rather as part of the (rural/agricultural) scene, and in fact various nearby families take wheel barrows of the most rotted manure for their gardens. This is organic waste, and an element of traditional rural life, and therefore is not seen as polluting. Similarly disorder and dereliction, if it takes a certain from, is not seen as depurifying. Along the lane running to, and past the Church - and thus in a symbolically strategic position - there is a degree of dereliction, in the form of a long garden wall which in part is slowly collapsing, and out of and alongside which, various weeds burgeon (fig 9.1). Although these are sometimes set about with a strimmer, they often grow unchecked. This, as far as I am aware, causes little concern (for example, it has not to my knowledge been raised in a parish council meeting). The scene is picturesque in a 'tumble down cottage' sense and last summer (1996) a request was made for these flowering weeds *not* to be cut back prior to one of the occasional weddings in the church. The point being that this dereliction, has a romantic quality to it, it is not impure if not seen as impure, and can therefore fit in with rural idyll images of a certain type. These examples of waste and disorder are not in conflict with the purity of the place because they are essentially organic and natural, part of a romantic view of human/nature relations[1].

[1] Romanticism is attracted to ruins and the dereliction wrought by nature, because it shows the natural recolonising the ground taken by the rational forces of enlightenment culture, and shows that the latter has not got complete control.

Fig 9.1 Picturesque, organic, pure dereliction in the form of weeds growing from wall leading to the church.

What jars in the village, in this form of purity, is *synthetic, modern* material and waste. Buildings, which were, for reasons of economy and/or the contemporary building practice, finished with concrete render, concrete block, synthetic roofing material, and even reconstituted stone, are generally considered aesthetically inferior. Now, and this is endorsed by current planning practice, natural materials of stone, wood, and clay tiles are almost exclusively preferred. Plastic bottles and packets outside the pub seem polluting. Similarly out in the fields, a pile of waste (natural) stone seems harmonious but a pile of broken bits of concrete again jars. (There is a tendency to tip waste stones in muddy gateways).

The village, in my (short) time here, and as far as I know before that, has never got involved in the Best Kept Village competition, which is run across the UK by the CPRE in the form of their local branches. This, as I agreed in conversation with another villager, was a blessing, (fn #42), because of, mainly, the hassle which one would expect to result from a serious participation in the competition, but also because it smacks of self-conscious, ostentatious ruralness, whereas Allswell likes to think itself a more 'natural' village. But the whole ethos of the Best Kept Village competition can perhaps shed some light on the notion of the rural as pure space.

In an article on a village which had won the competition in West Sussex three times in a row, and had been asked to stand down to give others a chance, a parish councillor was quoted as saying 'the secret lies not only in the village's natural beauty but in the diligence of its residents to keep it *perfect*... With another councillor I get up early and pick up any litter and check *everything*.' (Fleet, 1996, emphasis added). The logo of the competition - a village scene under a scrutinising magnifying glass (fig 9.2) - emphasises this attention to detail and perfection.

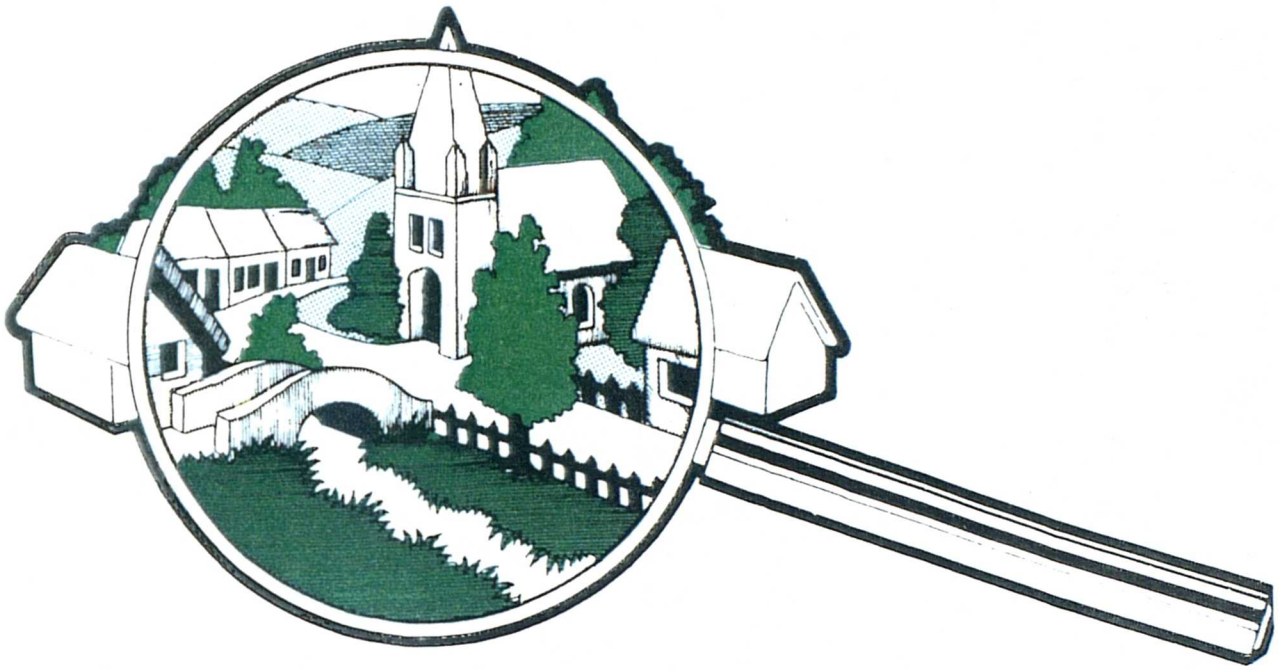


Fig 9.2 Best Kept Village Competition logo.

The very fact that a village can be considered perfect(able), and that 'everything' can be 'checked' implies that the formation of a perfect or pure space is possible both conceptually and logistically. There are such clearly defined notions of what a village should consist of (in the form of idyll constructions) that it is possible to realise it conceptually, and the scale of a village means that it is possible to do so logistically. The notion of the best kept city, or urban district, (Sibley's mixed spaces), would immediately come up against a much more uncertain and contested understanding of what a perfect urban environment should be like. Secondly, the prospects of delivering such, unless it was reduced to a village like scale, would be much more difficult. So this means that not only are rural (idyll) villages perfectible,

pure spaces, but that they are uniquely so, within a much more mixed and messy general environment.

The construction of Allswell as a childhood idyll, is at once an outcome of, and input to, the more general constructions of Allswell, (and similar villages), as pure, idyllic, natural spaces. The consequence of seeing Allswell as pure space, means that it can be also be seen as a space of (country) childhood idyll in that it is a location of naturalness and innocence, suitable for the naturalness and innocence of children. Such notions of rural idyll and children's place within it may benefit from an engagement with Bakhtin's (1981) analysis of the idea of idyll in terms of its representation in literature 'from most ancient times to the present'. This, I feel, merits more space than I can devote to it here, but I will outline some promising insights this may bring forth. Bakhtin identifies four types of 'pure idyll' - 'the love idyll (*whose basic form is the pastoral*), the idyll with a focus on *agricultural labour*, the idyll dealing with *craft-work*; and the *family idyll*' (p. 225, emphasis added). Already clear links with traditional constructions of the rural (and children) can be seen, and when further contexts, such as 'natural phenomena' are added along with notions of place, time and children as markers of time, this becomes even more marked. In expressions of idyll which function under 'folkloric time' these features are given

> expression predominantly in the special relationship that time has to space in the idyll: an organic fastening-down, a grafting of life and its events to one place, to a familiar territory with all its nooks and crannies, its familiar mountains, valleys, fields, rivers and forests, and one's own home. Idyllic life and its events are inseparable from this concrete, spatial corner of the world where the fathers and grandfathers lived and where one's children will live. This little spatial world is limited and sufficient unto itself, not linked in any intrinsic way to other places, with the rest of the world. But in this little spatially limited world a sequence of generations is localised that is potentially without limit. The unity of the life of generations (in general, the life of men) in an idyll is in most instances primarily defined by *the unity of place*, by the age-old rooting of the life of generations to a single place, from which this life, in all its events, is inseparable. This unity of place in the life of generations weakens and renders less distinct all the temporal boundaries between individual lives and between various phases of one and the same life. The unity of place brings together and even fuses the cradle and the grave (the same little corner, the same earth), and brings together as well childhood and old age (the same grove, stream, the same lime trees, the same house), the life of the various generations who had seen the same things. This blurring of all the temporal boundaries made possible by a unity of place also contributes in an essential way to the creation of the cyclic rhythmicalness of time so characteristic of the idyll (p. 225, emphasis as original).

Here in this account of idyll, purity of space is clearly critical, but there is also a powerful dimension of temporal purity. Children become symbols of the future purity of the space, future occupiers of the space as a projection of the present, and past -

> they frequently figure in connection with growth, the renewal of life, death (children and an old man, children playing around the grave, etc.). The significance and role of the image of children

> in idylls of this type is very great. Children first entered the novel from precisely this setting, still permeated with the atmosphere of the idyll (ibid, p. 227).

Clearly Allswell cannot easily be fitted into the ideal model set out above, mainly due to its connections to the 'outside' world and the already fragmentary state of its social temporal continuity, but there remain strong resonances. The concrete nature of the place does show signs of temporal continuity and purity - in that it is constructed as not having changed beyond recognition, and thus as being relatively unspoilt - and this aspect of the place carries part of the burden of temporal idyll/purity lost to other means. This can have the effect of purifying those who enter the space as residents, through engendering at least partial likemindedness, via collective lay and popular constructions and practice of ideas of (traditional) idyll. Although continuity of occupation within generation, as well as between generations, is also now completely shattered - children once they reach tertiary education age are almost always expected to be off to university, career and adult life elsewhere - there is an air of symbolic association constructed between children and the village a temporal pure space/idyll. At the 1997 village social Mr Simms, owner of the Hall, told me that in his 25 years of living in the village there seemed to be more children than ever around now, most of whom were at the social, and that this made the village a vibrant and healthy place. Also, recently, the Church's famous weather vane was taken down to be repaired and cleaned; this, as was discussed in the pub amongst a group of regulars 'is the symbol of the village' and at the service held to bless it prior to its reinstatement, there was a rush to have children photographed alongside this symbol of village continuity (fig 9.3). These conceptualisations place children at the heart of constructions of the rural idyll, and the rural (or certain places within it) as a pure space, and feed into the structuring of children's lives in that they're symbolic living out of the childhood idyll nourishes these powerful adult centred constructions of idyll.

More practically such constructions of idyll, mostly means that (some) guardians are prepared to give their children a greater degree of freedom than might otherwise be the case, - even if it is in terms of moving between houses, rather than the more wider ranging access to outdoor spaces - because they are comfortable that the children are not going to encounter over threatening sources of contamination or danger. This has clear implications for the notion of freedom which is embedded within discourses of the countryside as a childhood idyll.

Fig 9.3 Children being photographed along with the restored weather cock prior to its reinstallation.

9.1.2 Freedom and Control

Within constructions and consequent structuring of childhood in Allswell, there are a whole host of elements which complexly revolve around issues of freedom and control. These are related to the construction of Allswell as a pure space, but are cross-cut by other issues. Some of these are working counter to each other, and as a result individual and collective constructions and practices of childhood reflect the messy interaction of elements such as fear for children, fear of children, notions of innocence, freedom, order and control, and the age and gender of the children involved.

The relative purity of the village, in a way, calls into question one of the key icons of rural childhood idyll; that of freedom. It could be said that a main motivation, or at least (parental) advantage, for bringing up children in Allswell is one of control, in that, due to the relative isolation, and relative purity of the place, parents have control over what and who their children will have encounters with. The idyll/pure space is one of a limited possibility of encounters -as Bakhtin (1981) points out, the idyll 'is severely limited to only a few of life's basic realities' (p. 225), and Sibley (1995), that purity comes from (in part) the absence of diversity. This overall control provided by the village, in turn, allows parents to grant a qualified freedom within the village, or sectors of it. These sorts of constructions are again built in contrast with ideas that in towns it is much more difficult to control what/who children encounter and what they might get up to. Jemma Huxter told me -

> Children in the village, because of lack of access to the places in the town, they generally have to make their own amusement and will do things like walking, you know wandering around exploring the countryside, enjoying themselves in the brooks and using their imagination....there is nothing to do in the town but wander around the shops and that can lead to all sorts of things (11.8).

Such a view - that the nature of the environment was conducive to children *innocently* entertaining themselves, rather that 'getting up to no good' - was common amongst parents. But there are considerable degrees of variation within the amount of freedom granted to children, and some parents are not prepared to let degrees of freedom go beyond quite a narrow range. When I asked Diana Quick - who had told me her 9 year old son Harry was allowed to walk to friend's houses in the village - *(do you think if you were living in a city he would have that sort of freedom to wander around on his own?)* (14.3), she immediately picked up on the word wander and emphasised that -

> Well he doesn't actually *wander around*, it's arranged before hand and Amanda knows he is coming and if he's not there sort of in ten minutes or whatever...(14.3).

Further on in the interview Diana also said that Harry

> plays in the field opposite, with Walter, and I can see them from the house which is ideal (14.8).

Similarly Margaret, Walter's mother, told me

> They wander up through the village on their own now, but again I still always want to know where they are (21.1).

Other children have greater degrees of freedom, and of course this is age dependent, but not in any straight forward correlation. Last summer (1996) I was aware that Jack's (also 9) parents for the first time, sometimes did not know where he was when he was required for mealtimes or bedtime, although they have a short list of where he probably would be. This varying degree of freedom for children stems from a complex interaction of parental fear for their child's safety and belief that a degree of freedom is good for children, and also the child's level of demand. In some cases the freedom granted to children is limited, not so much because of the dangers seen in the spaces they might use, but because of the danger they may pose to the purity of the spaces through unsuitable behaviour. Here traces of notions of children being 'little devils' start to be at odds with the ordered and quite elements of the place. There is certainly a large element of concern and fear for children's welfare within the degree of control placed on them, but in some cases, if not all, to varying degrees, there is also a desire to control and monitor the children's actions. So in reality the freedom of children in Allswell is controlled through the nature of the place itself, and also within the place, through reasonably constant, even if sometimes remote, surveillance. For some parents such as Jane there was a poignant gulf between the imaginary world of childhood and the lived reality.

> In my ideal world, I'd love them to do that, go wandering off, *(in an ideal world, what's good about kids wandering about?)* Freedom...(but) I don't think I would let them just go away from 9 in the morning to (inaudible) 12, without knowing where they are going. Not like Enid Blyton books. (do *you think that's a real image of that sort of thing?)*. Yes. I think the country would be really nice if they could just go if into the fields, that's what I would like. *(But do you think children have ever done that really?)* I think some have, maybe it's just fiction (7.1).

OVER-ORDERING

There is a strong element at the heart of the country childhood idyll which sees it as paradisical, and this inevitably incorporates innocence, freedom, and *spontaneity*, and it is these which give it its status as perhaps *the* ideal childhood. Country childhood is thus seen as the antithesis of the concern for over-ordering of

childhood as set out in Chapter 3. But not only are the above forms of control, or spatial curfew, counter to this image of freedom, but in Allswell it is evident that some children's lives are very highly ordered on a temporal level. For example Gwen outlined Jim's (aged 7) week

> He goes to Baskerville's (a junior gym) on a Monday, he goes to French on a Friday, and on two other days he's either going somewhere else or people are coming here so they're not necessarily - *(are those quite routine?)* There's somebody here each week, *(right)*. He's doing something one way or another. They have quite a busy social life after school... One of the big things about mixing in villages are weekends. We tend to do everything very much as a family. So that cuts it out completely. Friday to Monday they don't play with, see any other children, because we do things together. Philip is away you see, a lot, so its the only time we have together.(10.3)

Many other children attend various organised events such as extra coaching in music, sport, or extra lessons after school. For those attending private schools the attendance times are often longer that those attending state schools, with some children not getting home from school until six o'clock, and having to attend school on Saturday morning. Consequently the 'free' time in conjunction with the 'free' space, which children need to live out the idyll, or live out their own agendas, idyllic or not, is for some quite restricted. In Allswell it is these forms of spatial/temporal ordering rather than the tidying up of the landscape itself which restricts children's freedom, but there is also an understanding that the freedom they do have is quite high compared with other children in other environments.

INNOCENCE AND INDEPENDENCE

Although it is somewhat uncomfortable to start questioning the notion of childhood as a state of innocence, it seems that here is one area where the structuring of, or at least constructions of childhood, significantly diverge from the lived experiences of children. This is not the point to get too deeply into the nature/nurture debate or that of 'Dionysian' (innate sin) / 'Apollonian' (innocent) child, to use Jenks' (1996) terms, but speaking as a parent of two young children it is astonishing and alarming to see the emergence of wilfulness, anger, cunning, manipulation, jealousy, vengefulness in children not yet capable of talking. These may well come from the examples of parents who demonstrate all these features, (as well as those of joy, love, care, kindness, happiness), or it may come from innate characteristics tied up with the processes of needs of survival and power/status, or as seems most likely a complex and volatile cocktail of the two. But the outcome is that children cannot be seen as innately innocent any more than can be seen as innately evil. They are as fractured and complex as adults, but without the stocks of knowledge and experience and the effect these have on individual subjects. One possible

consequence of children's lack of experience is that they do seem to express a more volatile and extreme range of emotions on a daily basis when compared to adults. For adults, experience will have shown them that smaller triumphs and tragedies do not last long in their effect, and that the fluctuations of everyday life will soon subsume these moments. For children the moment is much more powerful and engulfing. As Mantel puts it, 'children are struggling to get a fix on the world....Knowledge is revised from moment to moment, often from second to second...Every moment the world shifts, and you shift within it (as) childhood brings continual change, tiny crises every day' (Sunday Times/Books 12 JAN 1997). Experience may well flatten out these sharper terrains of desire, and this is why Deleuze and Guattari are concerned with childlike states, but in modern constructions of childhood, it is usually the (most) happy and good moments out of this range, (or sometimes the (most) 'evil' bits), which we tend to celebrate/(lament) as the true state. We focus on one part of childhood and turn it into the whole, and it becomes easy to see the obvious happiness and apparent innocence of children as something collectively beyond what it is.

Despite such doubts about the notion of innocence, what adult constructions of childhood as innocent provides is a degree of freedom and independence for children. In constructions of childhood where the child was seen as a source of disruption, even evil, regimes of control and discipline were an inevitably outcome of such constructions. Jenks (1996) suggests that under such, parenting

> consisted of distant and strict moral guidance, through physical direction. Stemming from this period, in the tradition of this image, a severe view of the child is sustained, one that saw socialisation as almost a battle but certainly a from of combat where the headstrong and stubborn subject had to be 'broken', but all for their own good. This harsh campaign of child-rearing persisted through the Puritanism of the seventeenth century, with rods not being spared in order spoil children, and even on into the nineteenth century... (p. 71).

In contrast to this, under the 'Apollonian' construction, children - (which Jenks states was formalised in Rousseau's *Emile*) (ibid) - 'are encouraged, enabled and facilitated' (ibid). As already considered in Chapter 3, referring to the work of Warner, *both* these adult constructions of childhood are powered more by adult concerns and views of themselves, rather than through any detailed interaction with children either collectively or individually. But almost by default it is the latter which structures children's worlds in ways which are more sympathetic to the actual needs and desires of children, because they are seen as innocence they can be afforded more independence. If, as I have suggested, rural childhood idylls are some of the

most developed, and now, last remaining, versions of the 'Apollonian' construction of childhood, these may be constructions of childhood least in conflict with a key need of childhood - that of freedom and space.

But nowhere is this construction and treatment of childhood taken to its logical or purest conclusion. Although Jenks (1996) points out that it is the 'Apollonian' view which appears to be 'the modern, Western...way of seeing the child', he qualifies this by adding that it is a 'public' view, and also that we only want to see the child which fits the model, the happy good child. There is plenty of evidence that this view of childhood does not hold undivided sway, and that processes of control and disciplining, are still powerfully in evidence, and that it is even still seen as a battle, as the popular raising young children manual *Toddler Taming* (Green, 1992) indicates.

It is very easy to put an ideological gloss over such discourses, when in fact the control they advise on, and all parents practice, is often to do with preserving the welfare of children, (and also the sanity of the parent). But within the warp of the myriad practical matters of not putting fingers into electric sockets, pulling kettles of boiling water off the kitchen work top, drinking bleach, and so forth, there is also a weft of cultural, and ideological enforcement, which belies the myth of the 'natural' mode of child rearing.

9.1.3 Permeability of Boundaries.

Boundaries are critical in the structuring of children's lives. These can come in both physical and ideological/cultural forms and often are constructions combining both to varying degrees. In physical terms, Allswell and its environs is divided up into to a number of private and public spaces which are defined by boundaries of one kind or another. This a socio-economic geography set out on adult terms and scale. Children essentially have to fit in with these patterns and structures, whereas if their desires were manifested in geographic terms this would probably result in a substantially different geography of spaces and boundaries. Thus children live in a world largely structured by forces which mostly ignore them as meaningful priorities when that world is formed and reformed. The more rigid this structuring is, the more it will constrain children's worlds within it. The degree of rigidity of such structures is determined in part by the extent to which the boundaries within it are permeable or impermeable. If these boundaries are to some extent permeable to

children, this gives them some chance to build their own geographies, to re-order the space to their own desires and in effect create a parallel dimension to that of the adult space which itself continues to function.

In Allswell the relative purity of the space as described above does mean that some of the *internal* boundaries are permeable to children. As already noted, Sibley (1995), in his work on boundaries and exclusions, makes a qualified agreement with Sennett, who talked of (North American) suburbs as being pure spaces. In such work the boundary under consideration is largely symbolic and that which encloses the entire space/group, and identifies it from the 'outside'; and in the case of Allswell, I have argued that a similar if not more complex and messy process is at work. But this strong 'perimeter' boundary, because it encloses a relatively pure space, allows internal boundaries, say, in between households or private and public space, to be weakened, and this may be particularly important for children, whose independent mobility is often mostly on a small, 'internal' scale. Parents in Allswell are aware of the significance of boundaries which contain their children; as Ted Fields said

> Somehow it does not matter how big the garden is, it is the boundary bit, that's where they are supposed to be, and that's where they are not supposed to be (21.1).

In stories of country childhood idylls, boundaries are often crossed with impunity, and there was a sense of this in the accounts of earlier Allswell childhoods, such as those of Tom's and Chris'. But as the community of Allswell has become more fragmented there is a sense that boundaries in the village have firmed up as neighbours become strangers and 'other' to each other. This is a consequence of the breakdown in familiarity already discussed, and the resulting firming up of boundaries can occur in both symbolic and physical terms. Hurst in his article in the parish magazine considered this.

> This "keeping ourselves to ourselves" mentally sometimes extends to our gardens -"this blessed plot" "this demesne" has to be girdled by conifers, guaranteed by our local garden centre to grow at least two feet per year, "just watch it grow!" God, how time drags by when one is trying to hide from one's neighbours! What ever happened to the country gardens which new no bounds and clambered affectionately over walls and fences (pp 1, 2, undated).

It is important to see boundaries in this case as a mix of the physical and the symbolic, and how through differing combinations of both they can vary in their degree of permeability. I will illustrate this using examples from within the village; firstly, the gardens which back onto Manor Farm yard. There are three houses (not including the Hall) whose gardens back onto the farm yard. All three of these are

recent barn conversions. In two cases they have been designed and specified from the outset of their conversion by the current owner/occupiers, both of these houses are the homes of two children. As part of the production of these new domestic spaces the newly formed gardens have been enclosed by a fence in one case and fence and hedge in the other. One of these garden fences has a section that has virtually been abandoned (see fig 7.15), in terms of being a barrier between the garden and the yard of Manor Farm, although the rest of the garden boundary is well maintained. This is entirely due to the children leaving their garden and playing around the yard. The garden fence of the other house is high and robust along its entire length and would be difficult for anyone particularly a child to climb, and the doing of such would feel very much like a violation. The children of the first garden are Jack and Ruby who, as I have already said, make extensive use of the farm yard along with other children. The two children of the other house rarely venture onto the farm yard, and when they do in the company of their parents or other adults, to see the animals or on some property maintenance sortie, they walk the considerable round route which takes them to the yard by means of the lane and access road. These fences in their physical form and up keep represent the ideological orientation of the families concerned, one are in favour of, or at least tolerant of, their children ranging beyond their garden, the other family is not. This comparison is not entirely straight forward because the children of the second family are younger than that of the first, but the eldest child is older than Christopher and Sam who when in the company of Jack and Ruby do now have to run of the yard and the tree house. Recently the boundary of the third house which adjoins the yard has also developed a degree of permeability, and the two children of this family, who have only lived in this house for two years, also now venture onto the yard. In effect, this third house along with Jack and Ruby's, Christoper's, Sam's (ours), and the farmyard, surround the house of the other family, and in the summer noisy games between the various children will flow around their house from garden, to garden, to yard, while sometimes the faces of the other children appear looking over the fence of their garden.

There are other instances in the village of boundaries being made deliberately permeable to children so they could get into the fields from their garden. When Gwen was talking about how her children sometimes played in the fields backing onto her garden I asked if there was a gate between the two and she replied

> No, no,. but we've got - when we put the fence up and they had barbed wire, so Chris put the barbed wire at the back of the fence, so he maintained what they put up if you like. But we've got one section, at the end here, where we didn't put any barbed wire, we didn't put the barbed wire on so as it was safe access. *(so that was a deliberate -?)* yea, (10.2).

There also was evidence that where boundaries were seen not to be permeable, more in symbolic rather than physical terms, children challenging and transgressing such boundaries was part of the country childhood idyll. Jane, whose garden is surrounded by the Hall grounds, which effectively cuts it off from the village and other fields in terms of non road or path access said

> What would be really nice if we could work our way out, as in crossing the field *(yes, is that the Hall ground there?)*, yea (resignedly), I don't think - you know it would be really nice; you could imagine them slinking through, and running the gauntlet, but I'm not sure. *(um, I'd like you to talk about that a bit more, pause, I don't know quite how to ask it but,)* um, because I suppose that's part of what it is in the country, isn't it, challenges you set up for your self. *(Where do you think these ideas come from?)* Mine are all Enid Blyton books, *(...did you read lots of them?)* oh yes (laughing), and- I'm absolutely amazed that she is still going strong (7.3).

(Jane has recently told me that her eldest child has made a few first, tentative exploratory sorties beyond their garden into the Hall grounds).

I have already said in Chapter 8 that (older) children seem to have a penchant for taking short cuts and making their own routes through the village. This, particularly when coupled with their 'other' use of space, is essentially children imposing their own geographies onto the adult geography of the village. The permeability of boundaries is clearly critical to this, and this is in turn dependent on the space being seen as pure, and the children's use of it as being innocent, although there are other constructions which clash with and restrict these, there are instances of some children being able to do this to some extent, in some places, a number of garden walls are crossed, and access to the 'den' and stream (site 11) for children in one part of the village does entail entering the fields, where there is no footpath, and skirting round the edge of the village.

9.1.4 Middleclassness: Idyll as Resource

There can be little doubt that Allswell is now predominately middle class, and there is a recognition within the village that this is so, and that it is a reasonably wealthy place. Although there is considerable variation within these, they are factors in constructions of it as a pure space. Iris described Allswell as a 'traditional middle class situation really, and monied really, the profile has changed a lot' (10. 5). While Linda also said 'I do think its middle class' and then added in reference to it being a

childhood idyll 'you can afford to be romantic' (7. 3). As such Allswell fits in with other emerging accounts of a socially restructured middle class rural, and also the theoretical considerations which have centred on this as a key analysis (Cloke, 1994, 1992; Murdoch and Marsden 1994; Murdoch and Pratt, 1994; Cloke and Thrift, 1990, 1987; Thrift, 1987).

In Chapter 3 I have already considered how popular tellings of country childhood stories contain traces of a middle class 'centre', and how this ties in with Cloke's (1992, 1994) concern for constructions and implication of the rural idyll and middle-classness within this and the reproduction of rural space more generally. Others are also concern with middle class intersections with rurality. Hoggart (1996) asks, if Murdoch and Marsden's (1994) assertion that rural environments are likely to be composed increasingly of the middle class, - and that 'the rural is all good for the middle class' (p. 92) - why are some still 'gentrifying inner city neighbourhoods'? He then speculates on the possibility of 'a particular middle class faction living in the countryside' (ibid). In Allswell at least five middle class families with young children have moved from urban areas to the village, and at least three of these were previously living in inner-city areas which could be classed as undergoing gentrification. So to job location, which Hoggart points to as one possible explanation for this urban /rural split in the middle classes, should be added parenting. As already covered in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, this desire to move to the country for the sake of 'the children' is very much a key framing of country childhood idyll discourses. In Allswell a number of parents commute considerable distances to work, either due to a change in job location while not changing house, or because they accepted this as a consequence of moving to the village in the first place. In both cases the desire to be part of the rural idyll and country childhood idyll outweighs the problems of commuting.

In some cases people who have ended up in the village after relocating for employment purposes, now seem to have shifted priority in that they would adapt their employment circumstances in order to remain living in Allswell. This either entails remaining in a job where otherwise promotion in status or salary would point to moving on, or limiting the search for alternative jobs to areas which would not entail moving house. Diana told me how they had previously moved house twice in four years before coming to the village to again relocate for a new job. - *(So you*

were following work to a certain extent?). Yes (14.2). This site of this job was then moved from a location about twenty minutes drive away from Allswell to one about an hour away. I asked *(...that's a bit further, have you thought of moving?).* Diana replied with a defiant - 'No. We are not moving' (and added) 'he's thinking about changing jobs actually'. *(Right, so he would rather move job than move house?).* Yes (14.2). Little and Austin (1996) in their research into gender and the rural idyll in a village in the same region as Allswell, also found that to have a high proportion of middle class incomes, and it is clear from their reported research, some of which has already been quoted, that many similar attitudes towards childhood in these two villages were shared, and although notions of country childhood idyll remains very strong it has in effect transformed quite substantially, in that before it was an more complete and enclosed life world - thus fitting in with Bakhtin's notion of idyll - but now has become a resource in middle class constructions and practices of childhood (idylls).

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS: COUNTRY CHILDHOOD IDYLL AS MIDDLE CLASS RESOURCE

Essentially the country childhood idyll has become a good, a resource, which parents can exploit as part of a package of bringing up children in village/country locations. As already shown, the idyll is not anymore a complete childhood either in actuality, or in adult constructions. There is no conception that growing up in the countryside is a complete or ideal childhood on its own. As Gwen put it, the quality of these (middle class) childhoods 'is worked at'.(10.5). Most children in the village regularly attend organised, often urban located, courses and events which are aimed at child entertainment/development. For example Jack although having a considerable active and outdoor life, including trees to climb, is also taken to climbing and canoeing courses, attends swimming course, plays football, and when younger went to Woodfolk meetings.

Valentine (1997a) and Ward (1990) point out there is a heritage of seeking out the best of both the country and the city worlds for one's children, and beyond that Williams (1985) talks more generally of the differing allures of these two types of spaces in the opening chapter of *The Country and the City.* For those who are able to do so, the best of both worlds is drawn upon, both generally, and for the raising of children. This attitude within the village was very common. But there was an idea

that being based in the country but exploiting the urban also was the right formation for children. Iris put it this way -

> They (the village children) shouldn't be just, um, grow up with tunnel vision, I think they must have wider horizons. Um, but I think - I'm much happier that they have the country, or James has the country as the core, - I see it like a shuttlecock, um, the little ball bit of the shuttlecock is his home in the country, but the fan of it is the town and cities around, life with culture and cinemas and theatres, and I'd much rather it was that way round rather that the ball of the shuttlecock being a city life with trips into the countryside...(5.29).

Iris also felt that to get to best of both worlds it was not only advantageous but even necessary to live in the country because country children, despite concerns over unworldliness, could reap the benefits of the urban more easily than an urban child could reap the benefits of the countryside- Iris said that she had 'noticed that the country is a deep mystery to, um, town, err, I've noticed this over the years, town children' (5.29).

In these terms the contemporary middle class country childhood idyll provides a resource which is both back drop to, and material and symbolic base for, childhoods which range far beyond the limited spatial and symbolic locations of traditional images of country childhoods. As some parents buy education and other resources for their children, they will also provide a country childhood setting. These constructions of contemporary country childhoods pick up and exploit certain iconic features of traditional images of country childhoods, while also being at odds with some of the other key features of such traditional childhood idylls.

9.2 'OTHER' IDYLLS: ORDER AND DISORDER REVISITED

If a place is ordered, it means that positions are allocated, functions defined, norms are established, and any unscheduled deviation from these are likely to create disorder. In chapter 8 I indicated that the resources children need from spaces, and the effect they have on spaces, means that in effect they are requirers of, and creators of, disorder - that is in terms of the ordered, allocated environments which are almost invariably so on adult terms and scales. This ordering extends from the micro (domestic) to macro (the wider environment) levels, and certain configurations of order (or disorder) are enmeshed in adult constructions of country childhood, and children's everyday life within these orders. But I think in this instance a consideration of these issues at the micro (domestic) level can highlight some of the key issues concerning children and order.

THE SMOOTH SPACE OF THE BEDROOM FLOOR

The order which children live within, or are socialised into as they grow, is clearly evident in the domestic space (see Sibley, 1995). Wood and Beck (1990) chart how a 'home for a child is but a field of rules' (p. 2) and that if the term rule is interpreted 'narrowly' there are 'thousands' which are applied as a matter of routine. To explore this Wood and Beck took a domestic family room, and recorded the rules which applied to the seventy objects - such as wall, door, chair - which made up the room. In question and answer sessions with the adults and children who lived in the space, each object was found to have a whole series of rules attached to it. They highlighted the example of the door which had 23 rules affecting it , such as; 'don't slam the door'; 'don't kick it'; 'don't hang on the door'; 'don't get your fingers caught in the door' (p. 10). The range of acceptable behaviour within domestic spaces is, as such analysis shows, extremely narrow and specialised, and this is why it is often a common matter of agreement between parents, particularly of younger children, that they spend their time at home saying 'no' and 'don't' to their children. Domestic spaces which are shared by adults and children are the ground of competing orders, competing geographies, with the set of rules particular to the space being the articulation of that competition. In some family spaces adult order is very highly maintained and such attract comments such as 'you wouldn't know that any children lived there'. At the other extreme some houses appear dominated by the chaos and disorder which children generate. There can be, and often are compromises between these two extremes. For example a 'rumpus room' in an otherwise ordered house, a space which does not come under the same regime as the rest of the house, a space which children can order to their own desires. This does provide children with there own space, but order prevails to the extent that the disorder itself it kept tidy in terms of being contained and prevented from spilling out or contaminating the other spaces. In our house once our young children are in bed, the space goes through a process of re-adultisation where toys, scattered cloths, bits of stray food, and disrupted furniture are tidied away/straightened out. In the instance of our children's bedroom/playroom, their toys are nominally ordered by type and scale and put away by us in boxes. Our children take a casual exception to this practice and as a matter of (aggravating) habit will empty the context of these boxes onto the bedroom floor, even if no particular item is being sought. Our children appear to like the visual clutter, the spectacle, of many objects all jumbled

together. Here it seems possible to use Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) smooth and striated spaces, as a useful conceptualisation of adult and child space. Adult space is deeply striated. In domestic settings this in the form of the rules of the house, and even the 'tidy boxes' in the bedroom. Outside the striations take the form of further sets of spatial demarcations and sets of rules. The smooth space of children's (aspirational) geographies, is set against these striations. But Deleuze and Guattari insist that these two types of spaces cannot be seen as being in any for of 'simple opposition' (ibid. p. 475). The opposition is 'more complex' because 'the terms of the oppositions fail to coincide entirely'. In other words, these conflicting geographies are not conflicting in any straight forward sense of opposing, but rather because they are profoundly other to each other. It would be mistaken to see smooth spaces as isotropic, (and consequently difficult to equate with notions of disorder), for smooth space 'is an aggregate of interaction (which is) in no way *homogeneous'* (ibid 475, emphasis as original). Children's (aspirational) construction of space is smooth in that it *scrambles* the striations of adult space. The latter is a series of closed off, allocated, (ibid p. 481), often monomorphic spaces, the singularity of which is protected by numerous rules as indicated above, and is a possible site of purity. Indeed Bauman (1997) draws clear links between purity and order - 'there is no way of thinking about purity without have an image of 'order', without assigning things to their 'rightful', proper places (p. 6). Children's geographies challenge the pure use of space and even the definitions of order which allocate the space its existence in the first place.

For a number of reasons, rural or countryside spaces may provide spaces where (striated) order is less ubiquitous and yet critically is, in principle, still usable for children. This theme has already surfaced at various earlier points, and I will briefly review them. In Chapter 2 I stated that many accounts of country childhoods feature elements of disorder being either attractive to children or created by children, for example, Dylan Thomas's delight at the dilapidation of his uncle's farm; and Richmeal Crompton's *William* who is always dirty, scruffy, has a derelict barn as his 'head quarters', and whose antics normally signal chronic, and hilarious disruption of adult worlds. Accounts such as Jeffories' (1882) fictional *Bevis* and Shoard's (1980) depict how the countryside's benefits for children revolve around overgrown corners and 'wasteland'. In Chapter 3, it was shown that one of the key discourses which are critical of popular images of country childhood idyll is that the countryside

has become increasingly ordered, and consequently these 'other' spaces which childhood require are being lost (Shoard 1980, Ward 1990). In Chapter 6, I questioned this by showing a number of examples of spaces within Allswell which do not fit in with this diagnosis, and how in fact there still appears to be plenty of areas and corners which have not been 'tidied up', and even new ones which are being created. In Chapter 4 I showed how children are also linked to disorder in urban areas, but how this is often a dangerous disorder, set in terms of crime and fear - fear of the corruption or even loss of children/childhood, but also of the disordering of society presented by dangerously feral 'little devils'. In Chapter 7 such discourses were reinforced by empirical material which reflected constructions of children as being children wild and *innocent* in the country (acceptable disorder), (as opposed to wild and *dangerous* in the city (unacceptable) disorder).

This construction of wild, natural, innocence is crucial for constructions of country childhoods, because it can enable children's use of areas of relative disorder, without them being seen as getting out of control, or losing their innocence. In Allswell this is strongly augmented by the construction of it as a relatively pure space, thus the control guardians have on children can be relaxed to some degree, because they are reasonably confident of what children may encounter or 'get up to'. In other words, if a space has elements of disorder, which has potential for children, and is also constructed by adults as a pure space, they are more likely to let children to use it, and the relative lack of structuring which is the corollary of disorder allows the children space in which to construct other orders. All this rests heavily on the romantic constructions of children and nature which are embedded in views of traditional rustic nostalgia, and which allows some disordered spaces to be pure, *if* they are constituted of the organic and the traditionally picturesque.

Nature has been seen as a source of disorder, as eco-feminist theories tells us (Merchant, 1980, 1992; Plumwood, 1993; Warren, 1993) and this construction of nature has gone hand in hand with the drive to control nature, through the practice of the patriarchal reductionist science based ideologies which were the hall mark of the emergence of the modern era (Pepper, 1986, 1996) and the technocentric environmentalism that is dominant today (O'Riordan, 1981). Nature is in conflict with the ordering of the landscape on human terms. As we are often told the natural state of Britain has long been suppressed by the adaptation and manipulation of

landscape (Hoskins, 1988). This process is constantly reproduced, and efforts by nature to re-intrude are continuously countered. So (adapted) nature itself exists in spaces which are structured on (adult) human terms. Perhaps the affinity between children and nature, which has been a theme throughout this work, is not only based on notions of their common innocence, but also their common tendency to disorder. Sibley (1995) states that 'Nature has a long historical association with the other' (p. 26). In the popular discourses considered in Chapter 2 it is noticeable that it is often the more 'natural' places, - the streams, woods, the *overgrown* corners, which are prominent. In the adult constructions of childhood in Allswell such notions were echoed, but in more complex and messy contextualisations which also had to deal with many other - often conflicting - notions such as fear or child safety and fear of trespassing. The material in Chapter 8 drew out, to a limited degree, that children are attracted to these spaces, such as the stand of conifers on Manor Farm yard, or the 'den' on the stream, but a major question which remains is whether this attraction children have to such places is some form of transcendental bond with nature, or whether it stems from the possibilities of freedom, privacy, and a varied and manipuable environment, which such places offer. Consideration of 'wild' paces in urban areas, and also other non-natural childhood idylls which are such due to their disorder character may contribute to the addressing of this question.

As Pratt and Murdoch (1993), have pointed out - that the "rural' may be practised in the 'urban", (p. 435), examples can be found of the country childhood idyll being practised in the urban. Edward Thomas, a significant articulator of the rural vision of England, and of the country childhood idyll (1938), also tells of his early childhood years spent in London, where Wandsworth Common and the surrounding streets were the sites of games and adventures for gangs of local children. These he describes in some detail, particularly the common, with its ponds and overgrown 'wastelands'. Here there is present just about all the elements of country childhood idylls, apart from perhaps the range of space available and also the presence of agriculture. (Instead there is the variety of the surrounding urban landscapes, the railway lines, and the bigger population of children who used the sites). He shows how the wild idyll could exist in urban settings. Thomas's memories are set in the 1890's and can fit in with nostalgic discourses of the urban once being a childhood idyll (see Chapter 4) in terms of freedom, before fear of crime, traffic, and other

dangers snuffed this out[2]. Ward's (1978) *Child in the City* and Moore's (1986) *Childhoods Domain* give more contemporary accounts of childhood in urban settings, and although they consider the tensions between childhood and urban life, they also show how derelict land which has be 'reclaimed by nature' becomes precious havens for children. This may indicate that it is a certain type of disordered/wild space which has the potential for children and that the strong urban/rural split in the identification of such spaces is essentially false. But it is adult attitudes to children using these differing rural/urban spaces, and how they are constructed as differently derelict which may be a key factor in structuring children's use of them.

Urban 'nature idylls' may come in conjuncture with the presence of space which is somehow other to prevailing conditions of order. For example Arnos Vale Cemetery is an Victorian cemetery which is situated amongst dense housing in the centre of Bristol. Like many of the other Victorian cemeteries in urban centres, It is an incredible jumble of overgrown paths, mature trees, and tombs, punctuated by a series of spectacular Victorian statuary[3]. These have become other spaces because of the difficulty and expense of upkeep, coupled with to the problems of finding alternative uses for them. Arnos Vales is made even more astonishing by being set on a steep hill side which provide a dramatic landscape, and views of it and the city beyond (fig 9.4). When I was photographing this place some years ago, I realised that it was a place used by some of the children who lived in the streets around it, and I came across some who had built a tree house (fig 9.5). This place with the degree of dereliction and the, in some ways macabre, drama of death provides a incredibly rich environment for children, if they are allowed to use it by their guardians and the owners who see it as little more than a chronic liability. It is often such forms of space, which through some contingent configuration of adult geographies, which children and nature, come to exploit. (Another example from my own childhood, was a large area of railway sidings, which were abandoned, and subsequently colonised by children and nature).

---

[2] The 'Reclaim the Streets' movement which is currently active in a number of urban centres are precisely aimed at reversing this process, and children are a key focus, and propaganda ploy in their campaigns.

[3] These are now attracting concerted conservation efforts both in terms of their value as spaces of 'greeness' and local history/culture, particularly Highgate in London, and offer considerable potential for use as such.

Fig 9.4 Views of Arnos Vale Cemetery, Bristol.

Fig 9.5 Children with tree house in Arnos Vale Cemetery in Bristol.

But the presence of nature may not be a necessity for the formation of such spaces, it may be merely that such spaces which cease to be ordered and managed exclusively and intensively, provide opportunities for both children and nature. The The Blitz on London, which can be seen as an unequivocal process of disordering, produced a particular form of childhood idyll, memories of which are recorded by the Opies' (1969), fictionalised by Graham Green (1970), and more recently been vividly displayed in John Borman's film *Hope and Glory.* Here the striations of streets, buildings, gardens, and often the rules which went with them were rendered into a smooth space in which - apart form the tragedy and danger - there was plenty of loose material, a retreat of adult authority, a disruptions of boundaries, and a population of children to exploit these features. This was a type space which children could reorder symbolically and materially (on a small scale). This may be an extreme example but it does emanate indications of the interaction between children and adult geographies. Where the dominance of the latter is for some

reason or another, withdrawn, or at least less rigidly ordered, this makes spaces where the otherness of children can be translated into their own worlds, places where the order of the adult world does not entirely 'structure away' such possibilities.

Children as the other, and otherness and disorder can be seen as having mutual potential in various philosophical concerns for otherness. For example it was the child as a site of otherness, otherness that is to adulthood, but beyond that adulthood in the form the rationalises of the enlightenment and latterly modernity, which attracted Rousseau, who had to go back to the child to find the ' natural man' he wanted. *Emile* as an educational treatise was a strategy for the preservation or even development of such otherness rather than its suppression. A more recent eruption of counter-enlightenment thought also refers back to children as a means of beginning (becoming) afresh. According to Bogue (1990, p. 29) part of Deleuze and Guattari's radical philosophical attempt to enact otherness can be traced via Nietzsche to Heraclitus's vision of the world of children as one of becoming, (other to being), and this is one of a number of occasions when these writers focus on the nature of childhood. Massumi (1992) tells us to 'cherish derelict spaces' for here also otherness might be found or might flourish, and so might the otherness of childhood. As the Opies' (1969) said -

> the peaks of a child's experience are not visits to a cinema, or even family outings to the sea, but occasions when he escapes into places that are disused, overgrown and silent. To a child there is more joy in a rubbish tip than a flowering rockery, in a fallen tree than a piece of statuary, in a muddy track than a gravel path. Like Stanley Spencer, he may see "more in a dustbin in his village than in a cathedral abroad". Yet the cult amongst his elders is to trim, to pave, to smooth out, to clean-up, to prettify to convert to economic advantage...(p. 15)

This association of children and disorder, or dereliction, perhaps points to the needs, or desires, of children in terms of space. If the countryside has provided such spaces, and constructions which have encouraged or allowed the use of such spaces, or if it has allowed the subversion of ordered space, again through notions of innocence and freedom, then there may be some congruency between adult constructions of the countryside as idyll, and the children's actual use of these spaces.

Little and Austin (1996) are rightly cautious about taking the results of their research into a specific place and applying them to the rural more generally, and this reflects is one of the key issues facing such research, to what extent can

findings from unique local (rural) places (Philo, 1993, Jones, 1995), be applied to other rural places. The same applies to stories I have constructed around Allswell. But in the work of Valentine (1997a), Bell (1994), and Little and Austin (1996), there are numerous glimpses of similar, if not congruent, constructions of country childhoods and this encourages me suggest that constructions of childhood and the consequences of these I have considered do have a wider currency within rural spaces in particular, and other areas of society more generally. This goes back from the local to the more 'culture wide' constructions which may be at large in the form of popular constructions in various discourse formations. These *do* have structuring influences on children's lives, in the rural and other types of places, yet they are then uniquely intermeshed with local circumstances. It is both that need to be considered, but the overarching constructions can be considered in generalised terms within such a process. To generalise about children's experiences of these worlds, or these structuring aspects of these worlds, is more problematic, for the assumptions that these will be generalisable still implies that childhood is being constructed rather than deconstructed, the latter here being taken as a attempt to split apart constructions in an attempt to make some form of contact with the other.

REFERENCES

Adams, R. (1993) Watership Down, Harmondsworth: Puffin Books.

Aitken, S. (1994) Putting Children in Their Place, Washington: Association of American Geographers.

Aitken, S. Ginsberg, S. P. (1988) 'Children's characterisation of place', Yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers, 50, 67-84.

Aitken, S. Wingate, J. (1993) 'A preliminary study of the self-directed photography of middle-class, homeless, and mobility-impaired children', The Professional Geographer, 45, 1, 65-72.

Agar, M. (1980) The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography, New York: Academic Press.

Agg, J. (1996) 'Sensitising Rural Research: Tapping into Others Reality', Paper given at the RGS/IBG Annual Conference, 5, 1, 1996, Theoretical Developments in Rural Geography: Concepts and Methods Session.

Alderson, P. (1995) Listening to Children: Children, ethics and social research, Ilford: Barnados.

Aries, P. (1962) Centuries of Childhood, New York: Vintage Press.

Babbie, E. (1992) The Practice of Social Research, Sixth Edition, Belmont: Wadsworth.

Bahktin, M. M. (1981) The Dialogic Imagination, Austin: University of Texas.

Barnardos (1995) The Facts of Life: The Changing Face of Childhood, Ilford: Barnados.

Barnes, T. Duncan, J. (eds.) (1992) Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape, London: Routledge.

Bates, H. E. (1961) The Darling Buds of May, London: Penguin.

Batsford, H. (1940) How to See the Country, London: Batsford.

Bauman, Z. (1993) Postmodern Ethics, Oxford: Blackwell.

— (1997) Postmodernity and its Discontents, Cambridge: Polity.

Bell, M. M. (1994) Childerley: Nature and Morality in a Country Village, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Berg, L. (1972) Look at Kids, London: Penguin.

Bernstein, R. (1991) The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity, Cambridge: Polity.

Blake, W. (1990) Songs of Innocence and of Experience, R. Willmott (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Blaut, J. Stea, D. (1971) 'Studies of geographical learning', Annuals of the Association of American Geographers, 61, 387-393.

— (1974) 'Mapping at the age of three', Journal of Geography, 73, 5-9.

Blaut, A. McLeary; G. (1970) 'Environmental mapping in young children', Environment and Behaviour, 2, 3, 335-349.0

Blunden, J. Curry, N. (1990) A People's Charter? London: HMSO.

Bogarde, D. (1993) The Great Meadow, London: Penguin.

Bogue, R. (1990) Deleuze and Guattari, London: Routledge.

Brown, P. (1993) The Captured World: the child and childhood in nineteenth-century woman's writing in England, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Brunskill, R. W. (1971) Illustrated Handbook of Vernacular Architecture, London: Faber and Faber.

Bryman, A. (1988) Quantity and Quality in Social Research, London: Unwin Hyman.

Bryman, A. Burgess, R. (eds.) (1994) Analysing Qualitative Data, London: Routledge.

Bunce, M. (1994) The Countryside Ideal: Anglo-American images of landscape, London: Routledge.

Bunge, W. W. (1973) 'The Geography', The Professional Geographer, 25, 4, 331-337.

Bunge, W. W. Bordessa, R. (1975) 'The Canadian alternative: survival, expeditions and urban change', Geographical Monographs No. 2, Toronto: York University.

Burgess, J. (1993a) Growing in Confidence, Understanding People's Perceptions of Urban Fringe Woodland, Countryside Commission.

— (1993b) 'Not yet out of the woods', Landscape Research Extra No. 12, Spring, 4-5.

Burnett, F. H. (1993) The Secret Garden, Ware: Wordsworth.

Burton, P. (1993) Local Authorities and Children's Play, working Paper 114, Bristol: SAUS Publications.

Carpenter, H. Prichard, M. (1984) The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chapman, M. Bond, J. Green, D. (1991) Historic Landscape Survey of 'Allswell' and Wilmington, Bristol: Avon County planning Department.

Chawla, L. (1986) 'The Ecology of Environmental Memory' Children's Environment Quarterly 3, 4, 34-42.

Chouinard V. (1994) (1994) 'Reinventing radical geography: is all that's Left Right', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 12, 2-6.

Clements, G. (1990) Just William's World, a pictorial map, London: Macmillan Children's Books.

Cloke, P. (1987) 'Concept, Theory and Rural Geography', Journal of Rural Studies, 3, 4, 295-296.

- (1993) 'On 'Problems and Solutions'. The Reproduction of Problems for Rural Communities in Britain During the 1980s', Journal of Rural Studies, 9, 2, 113-121.

- (1994) '(En)culturing Political Economy: A Life in the Day of a 'Rural Geographer'', in Cloke, P. et al, Writing the Rural: Five Cultural Geographies, London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

Cloke, P. Edwards, G. (1986) 'Rurality in England and Wales 1981: a replication of the 1971 index', Regional Studies, 20, 286-306.

Cloke, P. Milbourne, P. (1992) 'Deprivation and lifestyles in rural Wales - II. Rurality and the cultural dimension', Journal of Rural studies, 8, 4, 359-371.

Cloke, P. Milbourne, P. Thomas, C. (1995) 'Poverty in the Countryside: Out of Sight and Out of Mind' in C. Philo, (ed.), Off the Map, London: Child Poverty Action Group.

Cloke, P. Philo, C. and Sadler, D. (1991) Approaching human Geography, London, Paul Chapman.

Cloke, P. Thrift, N. (1990) 'Class and Change in Rural Britain', in T. Marsden, P. Lowe and S. Whatmore (eds.) Rural Restructuring, London: David Fulton.

— (1987) 'Intra-class conflict in rural areas', Journal of Rural Studies, 3, 4, 221-333.

Coffey, A. (1996) 'The power of accounts: authority and authorship in ethnography', Qualitative Studies in Education, Vol. 9, No. 1, 61-74.

Cook, I, Crang, M. (1995) Doing Ethnographies, IBG Catmog.

Cosgrove, D. (1983) 'Towards a radical cultural geography: problems of theory', Antipode 15, 1, 1-11.

Cosgrove, D. Jackson, P. (1987) 'New directions in cultural geography', Area, 19, 95-101.

Crouch, D. (1992) 'Popular culture and what we make of the rural, with a case study of village allotments', Journal of Rural studies, 8, 4, 359-371.

Crompton, R. (1992) Just William, (audio cassette), BBC Young Collection.

Dahl, R. (1994) Danny the Champion of the World, (first published in 1974) London: Puffin Books.

Davies, P. (1989) Mare's Milk and Wild Honey: a Shropshire Boyhood, London, Andre Deutsch.

Davis, J. Ridge, T: (1997) Same Scenery, Different Lifestyle: Rural Children on a Low income, London: The Children's Society.

Daniels, S. (1985) 'Arguments for a Humanistic Geography', in, R. J. Johnston, (ed.) The Future of Geography, London: Methuen.

Dear, M. (1995) 'Practising postmodern geography' Scottish Geographical Magazine, III, 3, 179-181.

Deleuze, G. Guattari, F. (1988) A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, London: Athlone Press.

Denzin, N. K. (1994), 'Evaluating qualitative research in the poststructural moment: the lessons James Joyce teaches us', Qualitative Studies in Education, Vol. 7, No. 4, 295 - 308.

Dewey, J. (1982) 'The development of American pragmatism', in Thayer, H. S. (ed.) Pragmatism, The Classic Writings, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.

Doel, M. (1994) 'Deconstruction on the move: from libidinal economy to liminal materialism', Environment and Planning A, 26, 1041-1059.

Douglas, M. (1966) Purity and Danger, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Dovey, K. (1990) 'Refuge and imagination, places of peace for childhood', Children's Environments Quarterly, 7, 4, 13-17.

Drabble, M. (1984) A Writer's Britain: Landscape in Literature, London: Thames and Hudson.

Drabble, M, and Stringer, J. (1987) The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Durkeim, E. (1983) Pragmatism and Sociology, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Entrikin, J. N. (1991) The Betweeness of Place: Towards a Geography of Modernity, Baltimore: John Hopkins University.

Emel, J. (1991) 'Ecological crisis and provocative pragmatism', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 9, 384-390.

Fine, G. A. Sandstrom, K. L. (1988) Knowing Children: Participant Observation with Minors, Newbury Park, CA; Sage.

Franklin, A. Franklin, B. (1996) 'Growing Pains: The Developing Children's Rights Movement in the UK', in J. Pilcher, S. Wagg (eds.) Thatcher's Children? Politics, Childhood and Society in the 1980s and 1990s, London: Falmer Press.

Game, A. (1991) Undoing the Social: Towards a Deconstructive Sociology, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Gans, H. J. (1967), The Levittowners, London: Allen Lane.

Gibbons, S. (1987) Cold Comfort Farm, London: Penguin.

Gilg, A. (1991) Review of Ward's *The Child in the Country,* Area, 23, 90.

Goodman, R. B. (1995) Pragmatism, a Contemporary Reader, London: Routledge.

Graham, E. (1995) 'Postmodernism and the possibility of a new human geography', Scottish Geographical Magazine, III, 3, 175-178.

Grahame, K. (1928) The Golden Age, London: The Bodley Head.

— (1951) The Wind in the Willows, London: Methuen Children's Books.

Gregory, D. (1994) Geographical Imaginations, Cambridge: Blackwell.

Green, C. (1992) Toddler Taming, London: Vermillion.

Green, G. (1970) The Destructors, in, Twenty-One Short Stories, London: Penguin.

Green, K. (1995) 'Children and traffic calming', in, P. Henderson (ed.) Children and Communities, London: Pluto Press.

Gunther, A. (1994) 'The Secret Garden revisited', Children's Literature in Education, 25, 3, 159-168.

Harper, S. (1987) 'A Humanistic Approach to the Study of Rural Populations', Journal of Rural Studies, 3, 4, 309-319.

— 'The British rural community: An overview of perspectives', Journal of Rural Studies, 5, 2, 161-184.

Halfacree, K. H. (1993), 'Locality and social representation: space, discourse and alternative definitions of the rural', Journal of Rural Studies, 3, 4, 309-319.

— (1994) 'The importance of "the rural" in the constitution of counter-urbanisation: the evidence from England in the 1980s' Sociologia Ruralis, 34, 166-189.

Hammersley, M. Atkinson, P. (1995) Ethnography: Principles and Practice, Second Edition, London: Routledge.

Hargrave, J. (1991) 'A community link', Child Education, June, 12.

Harris, J. (1982) 'The Political Status of Children' in K. Graham, (ed.), Contemporary Political Philosophy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hart, R. (1979) Children's Experience of Place, New York: Irvington.

— (1984) 'The geography of children and children's geography', in L. S. Liben, A. H. Patterson, N. Newcombe, (eds.) Spatial Representation and Behaviour Across the Lifespan, Chicago: Chicago University Press.

— (1987) Children's participation in planning and design, in C. S. Weinstein,T. G. David (eds.) Spaces for Children: The Built Environment and Child Development, New York: Plenum.

Hartley, L. P. (1958) The Go Between, London: Penguin.

Hill, F. Michelson, W. (1981) 'Towards a geography of urban childhood and youth', in, D. T. Herbert, R. J. Johnston (eds.), Geography and the Urban Environment, New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Hogg, J. (1959) 'The Boys Song' - in The Book of a Thousand Poems, London: Evans Brothers.

Hoggart, K. (1988) 'Not a definition of the rural', Area, 20, 35-40.

— (1990) 'Lets do away with the rural', Journal of Rural Studies, 6, 245-257.

— (1996) Review of J. Murdoch, T. Marsden, (1994) *Reconstituting Rurality*, in, Journal of Rural Studies, 12, 1, 90.

— (1997) The Middle Classes in Rural England 1971 - 1981, Journal of Rural Studies, 13, 3, 253-273.

Holland, P. (1992) What is a Child? Popular Images of Childhood, London: Virago.

Horn, P. (1974) The Victorian Country Child, Kington: The Roundwood Press.

Hoskins, W. G. (1988) The Making of the English Landscape, London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Houlton, D. and Short, B. (1995) 'Sylvanian Families: the production and consumption of a rural community', Journal of Rural Studies 11, 4, 367-386.

Humphries, S. Mack, J. and Perks R. (1988) A Century of Childhood, London: Sidgwick & Jackson.

Hughes, T. (1984) What is The Truth? A Farmyard Fable For The Young, New York, Harper & Row.

Hughes, T. (1979) Allswell Poor House, a History, (unpublished manuscript).

Hunt, P. (1995) Children's Literature: an Illustrated History, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jackson, P. (1989) Maps of Meaning: an Introduction to Cultural Geography, London: Unwin Hyman.

— (1994) 'Participant Observation' in R. Johnston, D. Gregory, D. M. Smith, (eds.) The Dictionary of Human Geography, Third Edition, Oxford: Blackwell.

James, S. (1990) 'Is there a 'place' for children in geography', Area 22, 378-383.

— (1991a) 'Children and geography: a reply to David Sibley', Area 23, 378-383.

— (1991b) 'The Urban Rural Myth - or Reality?' Dept. of Geography, University of Reading, Geographical Papers, No. 107.

Jefferies, R. (1882) Bevis: The Story of a Boy, Volume I, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington.

Jacobs, E. Jacobs P. (1980) 'Children as managers', *Ekisitics*, 282, 135-137.

James, A. Prout, A. (eds.) Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood, London: Falmer Press.

Jenks, C. (1996) Childhood, London: Routledge.

Johnson, V. Hill, J. Ivan-Smith, E. (1995) Listening to Smaller Voices: Children in an Environment of Change, Chard: Actionaid.

Johnston, R. J. (1986), Philosophy and Human Geography, London: Edward Arnold.

Jones, O. (1995) 'Lay discourses of the rural: developments and implications for rural studies', Journal of Rural Studies 11, 1, 35-49.

— (1997) 'Little Figures, Big Shadows, Country Childhood Stories', in Cloke, P. and Little, J. (eds.) Contested Countryside Cultures, London: Routledge.

Jones, G. R. (1996) The Nation's Favourite Poems, London: BBC Books.

Jones, S. (1985) 'The Analysis of Depth Interviews', in R. Walker, (ed.) Applied Qualitative Methods, Aldershot: Gower.

Katz. C. (1986) 'Children and the environment: work, play and learning in rural Sudan', Children's Environments Quarterly, 3, 4, 43-51.

— (1991a) 'Sow what you know: the struggle for social reproduction in rural Sudan', Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 81, 3, 488-514.

— (1991b) Cable to cross a curse: the everyday practices of resistance and reproduction among youth in New York City. Unpublished Manuscript, Department of Environmental Psychology, City University of New York.

— (1993) 'Growing girls/closing circles', in, C. Katz, J. Monks, (eds.) Full Circles, Geographies of Women over the Lifecourse, London: Routledge.

— (1994) 'Playing the field: questions of fieldwork in geography', The Professional Geographer, 46, 1, 67-72.

Keith, W. J. (1975) The Rural Tradition: William Cobbett, Gilbert White: and other non-fiction prose writers of the English countryside, Brighton: Harvester Press.

Kitteringham, J. (1975) 'Country work girls in nineteenth-century England', in R. Samuel et al (1975), Village Labour, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Kluckhohn, F. R. (1940) 'The participant-observer technique in small communities', American Journal of Sociology, 46, 331-343.

Lane, D. (1997) 'Pointers for action', Child Care Forum, 21, 5.

Lather, P. A. (1991) Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy Within The Postmodern, London: Routledge.

— (1993) 'Fertile obsession: validity after postructuralism', Sociological Quarterly, 34, 673-693.

Latour, B. (1988) 'The Politics of explanation: an alternative', in, S. Woolgar (ed.) Knowledge and Reflexivity, London: Sage.

Leach, P. (1994) Children First, London: Michael Joseph.

Letche, J. (1994) Fifty Contemporary Thinkers: from Structuralism to Postmodernity, London: Routledge.

Lee, L. (1962) Cider with Rosie, London: Penguin.

Liljestrom, R. (1980) Children and Culture, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, Cultural Policy Studies Series, 1.

Little, J. Austin, P. (1996) 'Women and the rural idyll', Journal of Rural Studies 12, 2, 101-111.

Livingston, L. A. (1994) Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850-1940, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Loriggio, F. (1990) 'Anthropology, literary theory, and the tradition of modernism', in, M. Manganaro (ed.) Modernist Anthropology, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Lowe, P. Murdoch, J. and Cox, G. (1995) 'A Civilised retreat? Anti-urbanism, rurality and the making of an Anglo-centric culture' in Healey, P. Cameron, S. Davoudi, S. Graham, S. and Madani-Pour, A. (eds.), Managing Cities: The New Urban Context, London: Wiley.

Lurie, A. (1991) Not in Front of the Grown-ups: Subversive Children's Literature, London: Sphere Book.

Lynd, S. (1942) English Children, London: William Collins.

Lyotard, J. (1979) The Postmodern Condition, a Report on Knowledge, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Macnicol, J. (1986) 'The effect of the evacuation of schoolchildren on official attitudes to State intervention' in H. L. Smith (ed.) War and Social Change, British Society in the Second World War, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Massumi, B. (1992) A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari, Cambridge: MIT Press.

McLaren, P. (1992) 'Collisions with otherness: "travelling theory, post-colonial criticism, and the politics of ethnographic practice - the mission of the wounded ethnographer', Qualitative Studies in Education, 5, 1, 77-92.

McLaughin, B. P. (1995) 'Deprivation in rural areas', Report to the Department of the Environment (unpublished).

— 'The rhetoric and reality of rural deprivation', Journal of Rural Studies, 2, 4 291-307.

McNeish, D. Roberts, H. (1995) Playing it Safe: Today's Children at Play, Ilford: Barnados.

MacNeice, L. (1988) MacNeice - Selected Poems, M. Longley, (ed.), London: Faber and Faber.

Marshall, A. (1993). 'Where the grass isn't always greener', School's Out, Spring, 10-11.

Massey, D. (1995) The Conceptualization of Place, in Massey, D. Jess, P. (eds.) A Place in the World? Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Massingham, H. J. (1939) The English Countryside, London: Batsford.

Matthews, M. H. (1992) Making Sense of Place, Lanham: Barnes and Noble.

Mingay, G. (ed.) (1989) The Rural Idyll, London: Routledge.

Mellor, A. (ed.) (1988), Romanticism and Feminism, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

— (1993), Romanticism and Gender, London: Routledge.

Merchant. C. (1980) The Death of Nature, Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution, San Francisco: Harper Row.

— (1992) Radical Ecology: The Search for a Liveable World, London: Routledge.

Moore, R. C. (1986) Childhood's Domain: Play and Place in Child Development, Beckenham: Croom Helm.

— (1889) 'Plants as play props', Children's Environments Quarterly, 6, 1, 3-6.

Mormont, M. (1990) 'What is rural? or, how to be rural: towards a sociology of the rural', in, T. Marsden, P. Lowe, and S. Whatmore, (eds.), Rural Restructuring, London: David Fulton.

Munro, I. S. (1978) Preface, The Country Child, Lincoln: Centre for the Study of Rural Society.

Murdoch, J. Marsden, T. (1994) Reconstituting Rurality, London: UCL Press.

Murdoch, J. Pratt, A. C. (1993) 'Rural Studies: modernism, postmodernism and the 'post-rural'', Journal of Rural Studies, 9, 4, 411-428

— (1994) 'Rural Studies of Power and the Power of Rural Studies: A reply to Philo', Journal of Rural Studies, 10, 1, 83-87.

National Children's Play and Recreation Unit (1992a) Children Today in Leicestershire: Diverse Opportunities, London: National Children's Play and Recreation Unit.

— (1992b) Children Today in Devon: playing in the countryside - a study of rural children's services,

National Voluntary Council for Children's Play, (1994) A Charter for Children's Play, London: National Voluntary Council for Children's Play.

National Playing Fields Association, Humberside Playing Fields Association (1984) Talking About Play, Howden: Humberside Playing Fields Association.

Newman, N. (1972) God Bless Love, London: Collins.

— (1978) All Our Love, London, Collins.

Okely, J. (1996) Own or Other Culture, London: Routledge.

Opie, I. Opie, E. (1969) Children's Games in Streets and Playgrounds, London: Oxford University Press.

O'Riordan, T. (1981) Environmentalism, London: Pion.

Pepper, D. (1986) The Roots of Modern Environmentalism, London: Routledge.

— (1996) Modern Environmentalism: An Introduction, London: Routledge.

Perin, C. (1988) Belonging in America, Maidson: University of Wisconsin Press.

Philo, C. (1992) 'Neglected rural geographies: a review', Journal of Rural Studies 8, 2, 193-207.

— (1993) 'Postmodern rural geography: a reply to Murdoch and Pratt', Journal of Rural Studies, 9, 4, 429-436.

— (1997) 'Of other rurals' in Cloke, P. and Little J. (eds.) Contested Countryside Cultures, London: Routledge.

Pilcher, J. Wagg, S (eds.) (1996) Thatcher's Children? Politics, Childhood and Society in the 1980s and 1990s, London: Falmer Press.

Pile, S. and Thrift, N. J. (1995) Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformations, London: Routledge.

Plumwood, V. (1993) Feminism and the Mastery of Nature, London: Routledge.

Pratt, A. C. (1996) 'Discourses of rurality: loose talk or social struggle?', Journal of Rural Studies, 12, 1, 69-78.

Pred, A. (1990) Making Histories and Constructing Human Geographies: The Local Transformation of Practice, Power Relations and Consciousness, Oxford, Westview Press.

Putnam, H. (1995) Pragmatism: An Open Question, Oxford: Blackwell.

James, A. Prout, (eds.) Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood, London: Prout, A. James, A. (1990) 'A New Paradigm for the sociology of Childhood', A. Falmer Press.

Read, H. (1933) The Innocent Eye, London: Faber and Faber Ltd.

Roberts, A. (1980) Out to Play: The Middle Years of Childhood, Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.

Rorty, R. (1989) Contingency, Irony and Solidarity, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

— (1991a) Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers Volume 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

— (1991b) Consequences of Pragmatism, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

— (1991c) Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers Volume 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rose, L. (1991) The Erosion of Childhood: Child Oppression in Britain, 1860-1918, London: Routledge.

Rose, J. (1984) The Case of Peter Pan - or - The Impossibility of Children's Fiction, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Rousseau, J. J. (1955) Emile (trans. B. Foxley), New York: Dutton.

Ryan, C. (1994) A Comparative Study of rural and Urban Children in Their Environment, unpublished dissertation, University of Hull.

Samuel, R. (1975) "Quarry roughs': life and labour in Headington Quarry, 1860-1920. An essay in oral history', in R. Samuel et al (1975), Village Labour, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Santianiello, J. (1978) 'Rural deprivation', in, The Country Child, Lincoln: Centre for the Study of Rural Society.

Sayer, A. 'The 'new' regional geography and problems of narrative', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 7, 252-276.

Schactel, E. (1959) Metamorphosis: On the Development of Affect, Perception, Attention, and Memory, New York: Basic Books.

Scheurich, J. J. (1996) 'The masks of validity: a deconstructive investigation', Qualitative Studies in Education, 9, 1, 49-60.

Shoard, M. (1980) The Theft of the Countryside, London: Maurice Temple Smith.

— (1987) This Land is Our Land: The Struggle for Britain's Countryside Grafton.

Short, B (ed.) (1992) The English Rural Community, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Short, J. (1991) Imagined Country: Society, Culture and Environment, London: Routledge.

Shurmer-Smith, P. and Hannam, K (1994) Worlds of Desire, Realms of Power: a Cultural Geography, London: Edward Arnold.

Sibley, D. (1981) Outsiders in Urban Society, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

— (1988) 'Survey 13: Purification of Space', Environment and planning D: Society and Space, 6, 409-421.

— (1991) 'Children's geographies: some problems of representation', Area 23, 269-270.

— (1995) 'Families and domestic routines: constructing the boundaries of childhood' in S. Pile, N. Thrift, (eds. , Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation, London: Routledge.

— (1996) Review of Matthews, M. H. (1992) *Making Sense of Place*, Journal of Rural Studies, 12, 1, 87-88.

— (1997) 'Endangering the sacred: nomads, youth culture and the English countryside', in P. Cloke, J. Little (eds.), Contested Countryside Cultures, London: Routledge.

Silverman, D. (1993) Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction, London: Sage.

Sobel, D. (1990) 'A place in the world: adult's memories of childhood's special places', Children's Environment Quarterly, 7, 4, 5-12.

Spivak, G. C. (1988) In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics, New York: Routledge.

Spencer, C. Blades, M, Morseley, K. (1989) The Child in the Physical Environment: The Development of Spatial Knowledge and Cognition, Chichester: John Wiley.

Stake, R. (1995) The Art of Case Study Research, London: Sage.

Stainton-Rogers, R, Stainton-Rogers, W. S. (1992) Stories of Childhood: Shifting Agendas of Child Concern, Hemel Hempsted: Harvester-Wheatsheaf.

Suransky, V. P. (1982) The Erosion of Childhood, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sustrans (1996) How to Establish a Safe Routes to School Project, RR11, Bristol: Sustrans Routes for People.

Swift, G. (1984) Waterland, London: Pan Books.

Taussig, M. (1990) 'Violence and resistance in the Americas: the legacy of conquest', Journal of Historical Sociology, Vol. 3, No. 3, 209 - 224.

Thrift, N. J. (1985) 'Flies and germs: a geography of knowledge', in D. Gregory and J. Urry, (eds.) Social Relations and Spatial Structures, London: Macmillan.

— (1987) 'Manufacturing rural geography? Journal of Rural Studies, 3, 1, 77-81.

Thomas, D. (1952) Collected Poems 1934-1952, London: J. M. Dent & Sons.

— (1965) Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog, London: J. M. Dent & Sons.

Thomas, E. (1938) The Childhood of Edward Thomas: A Fragment of Autobiography, London: Faber and Faber.

Thompson, F. (1973) Lark Rise to Candleford, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Tindall, J. (1991) Countries of the Mind: The Meaning of Place to Writers, London: Hogarth Press.

Titman , W. (1994) Special Places; Special People: The Hidden Curriculum of school Grounds, Godalming: WWF UK.

Tremleth, G. (1991) Dylan Thomas, London: Constable and Co. Ltd.

Trollope, J. (1993) The Country Habit, an Anthology, London: Bantam Press.

Turner, B. S. (1994) Introduction to Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity, by C. Buci-Glucksmann, London: Sage.

Valentine, J. (1990) 'Women's fears and the design of public spaces', Built Environment, 16, 4, 288-303.

— (1996) 'Children should be seen and not heard: the production and transgression of adult's public space', Urban Geography, 17, 2, 138-188.

— (1997a) 'A safe place to grow up? Parenting, perceptions of children's safety and the rural idyll', draft manuscript, forthcoming in Journal of Rural Studies.

— (1997b) '"Oh yes I can." "Oh no you can't": Children's and parents understanding of kids' competence to negotiate public space safely', Antipode, 29, 1, 65-89.

— (1997c) 'Angels and Devils: moral landscapes of childhood', draft manuscript, forthcoming in Environment and Planning D: Society and Space.

Walker, A. (ed.) (1978) Rural Poverty: Poverty, Deprivation and Planning in Rural Areas, London: child Poverty Action Group.

Wallace, J. (1995) 'Technologies of 'the child': towards a theory of the child-subject', Textual Practice, 9, 2, 285-302.

Ward, C. (1977/8) The Child in the City, London: Architectural Press.

— (1990) The Child in the Country, London: Bedford Square Press.

Ward S. (1991) The Countryside Remembered, London: Century.

Warner, M. (1994) Managing Monsters: Six Myths of our Time, London: Vintage.

Warren, K. J. (1993) 'A philosophical perspective on ecofeminist spiritualities', in C. J. Adams (ed.), Ecofeminism and the Sacred, New York: Continuum/Crossroads Books.

West, C. (1989) The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Geneology of Pragmatism, London: Macmillan.

Whatmore, S. (1993) 'On doing rural research (or breaking the boundaries)', Environment and Planning. Vol A, 25, 2, 605-607.

Wheeler, K. M. (1993) Romanticism, pragmatism and deconstruction, Oxford: Blackwell.

White, K. (1997) 'Space and time', Child Care Forum, 21, 2.

Williams. R. (1985) The Country and the City, London: The Hogarth Press.

Williamson, H. (1932) The Beautiful Years, London: Faber and Faber.

Willmott, R. (ed.) (1990) William Blake - Songs of Innocence and of Experience, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Winchester, H. P. M. (1991) 'The geography of children', Area, 23, 357-360.

Woolgar, S. (1988) 'Reflexivity is the ethnographer of the text', in, S. Woolgar, (ed.) Knowledge and Reflexivity, London: Sage.

Wood, D. Beck, R. (1990) Do's and dont's: family rules, rooms and their relationships, Children's Environments Quarterly, 7, 1, 2-14.